

Leadership's Effect on Morale

²Lester (1990) proclaimed that “[c]learly, the Principal is the key figure in raising teacher morale and commitment” (p. 274). Other educational researchers have³ concurred that a school’s administrative leadership plays a vital role in the establishment of school climate and teacher morale (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; Butt, Lance, Fielding, Gunter, Rayner, & Thomas, 2005; Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004; Evans, 1997). This¹ research includes a review of several studies that address a principal’s role in influencing teacher morale and teacher job satisfaction, and, thus, student achievement.

To examine their effects on teacher morale,⁴ researchers have targeted specific components of educational leadership for study both from a practical as well as a theoretical standpoint.⁵ Egley and Jones (2005) focused on the relationships of elementary teachers and their principals and studied the nuances therein. They found that when principals treated their staff members more like equals and invited them into leadership roles, teacher morale overall improved. A principal who⁶ invites leadership in this way tends to focus on “compassion and respect for the individual through collaboration and mutual respect” (Egley & Jones).⁷ In a much earlier study, Bidwell (1957) investigated the

roles that teachers expected their principals to fill. Subsequently, he discovered that when⁸ teachers felt their principals fulfilled such expected roles, there was job satisfaction and high morale. He also found that⁹ when teachers did not believe their leaders fulfilled their expectations, they possessed lower morale and increased job dissatisfaction.¹⁰ Implied in these findings, therefore, is the notion that principals who fulfill the teachers’ expectations of their role can positively affect the morale of those teachers and increase

satisfaction in their jobs.¹¹ Similarly, Schulz and Teddlie (1989) determined that the principal's use of *Referent Power* is directly related to teacher morale.¹² Referent Power refers to the power a leader holds when his/her followers identify with and wish to emulate him/her.¹³ Additionally, Blase, Dedrick, and Strathe (1986) further reported that teachers who identified with their principals and felt they had traits worthy of emulation sustained higher levels of job satisfaction.

¹⁴Hipp (1997) initiated a qualitative study examining the relationship of school leadership to teacher efficacy. In her study, the very definition of "efficacy" encompasses teacher morale. The specific¹⁶ scripted interview questions of which the study consisted were designed to delve into issues regarding teacher efficacy and principal behaviors according to the thirty-four teachers surveyed. The results concluded that¹⁷ the following principal actions were found to significantly influence teacher efficacy: "modeling behavior, inspiring group purpose, recognizing teacher efforts and accomplishments, providing personal and professional support, managing student behavior, and promoting a sense of community" (Hipp).

¹⁸Thomas (1997) presented a meta-analysis focusing on leadership, leadership theory and style, and the effect of principal leadership on teacher morale.¹⁸ The results supported that the leadership style of the building principal had a significant effect on teacher morale.²⁰ To be precise, a collaborative leadership style had the most positive impact on teacher morale. In other words,²¹ schools with shared visions and decision-making responsibilities were discovered to have higher teacher morale than schools

which allowed less teacher input into decision-making.

In order to determine which leadership style had the greatest impact on teacher morale, Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen (2006) examined two leadership styles, *transactional* and *transformational leadership*.²² Transformational leadership traits, they found, have a positive correlation to teacher morale.²³ On the other hand, they found transactional leadership traits to have the opposite correlation to teacher morale. As mentioned before,²⁴ transactional leadership offers motivation simply through rewards, for instance, rewarding work with financial compensation.²⁵ In contrast, transformational leadership tends to provide the follower with more motivation as it enhances the individual's performance "beyond the exchange level to the level of self-actualization" (Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen, 2006).

In contrast to some of the other findings,²⁶ Evans and Johnson (1990) surveyed middle and high school teachers and found inconsistent results.²⁷ From their study, they concluded that principal leadership had an overall effect on the stress level of teachers, but they found the correlation between principal behaviors and teacher job satisfaction to be insignificant. They also determined that a principal's leadership has very little to do

with teacher job satisfaction. However,²⁸ it is important to understand that the only sample surveyed in this study consisted of a group of Physical Education teachers.

In order to determine the factors which affect teacher morale,³⁰ Andrew, Parks, and Nelson (1985) performed a study that would also produce an instrument that could be used to measure morale and a handbook that would aid schools in raising morale.³¹ In

schools where a high morale already existed, principals were found to embody the following list of traits or behaviors: a good listener, enthusiastic, outgoing, friendly, available, energetic, fair, and organized.³² In schools where morale was low, the principals' roles, traits, or behaviors displayed consisted of the following list: disciplinarian, inconsistent, unsupportive, formal, and impatient.³³ Throughout their study, they developed the following list of administrative behaviors, roles, and practices that ensure and sustain high teacher morale:

- Be open and have good morale yourself;
- Communicate at many levels;
- Involve others in setting objectives, planning, and decision-making;
- Set planning priorities;
- Your job is to get things done, not to do them yourself;
- Know the values and needs of your community, your students, and your staff;
- Hold high expectations for staff, but recognize your responsibility in helping them meet your expectations;

- Give recognition to those who are helping to advance the objectives of the school;
- Have written policy developed for procedures and regulations;
- Exercise your authority;

- Provide resources needed to achieve the school's objectives; and
- Do your best to obtain competitive salary levels so you can obtain the very best staff. (pg. 12)

³⁴Bhella (1982) conducted a study that correlated the Perdue Teacher Opinionaire and The Principal Leadership Style Questionnaire.³⁵ The results concluded that a significant relationship exists between teacher/principal rapport and the principal's level of concern for people and production.³⁶ The results indicated that an administrator who exhibits a high level of concern for people also has a better rapport with the staff.

The final two studies submitted in this review enlist the use of two instruments commonly present in research regarding principal leadership practices.³⁷ In addition, the instrumentation, method of data collection, and statistical methods of analysis of these studies are quite similar as well.³⁸ Each of these studies utilized the Perdue Teacher Opinionaire, which is a questionnaire to evaluate leadership.³⁹ The second study also included the use of the Leadership Practices Inventory.⁴⁰ In their study,⁴⁰ Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995) focused on the relationship between high school principals' leadership practices and styles with teacher morale using the Perdue Teacher Opinionaire.⁴¹ To collect

the data, the Leadership Ability Evaluation instrument was used.⁴² The sample for the study consisted of 40 high school principals and 411 high school teachers.⁴³ The results of the study demonstrated a low-positive correlation between the principal's leadership style and the teacher morale.⁴⁴ It is important to note that the design of the study was such that the principal's leadership was self-reported rather than teacher-reported.

⁴⁵ The last study investigated the relationship between principal leadership, teacher morale, and student achievement (Houchard, 2005).⁴⁶ The instruments utilized were the Perdue Teacher Opinionnaire, the Leadership Practices Inventory, and the North Carolina End-of-Course exams.⁴⁷ The cross-section of this study consisted of teachers who voluntarily submitted their responses.⁴⁸ One hundred thirteen of the 124 teachers polled responded to the Perdue Teacher Opinionnaire and 115 responded to the Leadership Practices Inventory. The sample⁴⁹ population included eleven administrators who responded to the Perdue Teacher Opinionnaire, but no information on the number of administrators who responded to the Leadership Practices Inventory is known.⁵⁰ Several significant relationships were evinced by the study. In the⁵¹ morale category, Rapport with the Principal had a significant correlation to the leadership category of Enabling Others to Act and Encouraging the Heart.⁵² Secondly, a significant correlation was found to exist between the morale aspect of Satisfaction with Teaching with the leadership aspect of Inspiring a Shared Vision and Enabling Others to Act.⁵³ Another significant correlation evidenced was that between the morale factor of Rapport with Teachers and the leadership aspect of Enabling Others to Act and Encouraging the Heart. In addition, there was also a⁵⁴ significant correlation found between the morale factor of Teacher Load and

the leadership factor of Inspiring a Shared Vision and Enabling Others to Act. In the fifth⁵⁵ and final point, a positive correlation was found between the morale aspect of Faculties and the leadership aspect of Inspiring a Shared Vision and Enabling Others to Act.

⁵⁶ This review of the literature includes several works and studies that overwhelmingly establish a link between the leadership styles and behaviors of the

principal and the morale of the teachers. A myriad of studies have been presented which repeatedly demonstrated that teacher morale was significantly affected by the leadership of the principal. Some of the⁵⁷ research included also demonstrated a positive correlation between teacher morale and academic achievement. It can be concluded, therefore, that a⁵⁸ principal's leadership plays a vital role in establishing the climate and culture of the school, regulating teacher morale, and, ultimately, determining student achievement.⁵⁹ In virtually every study, the literature shows a positive correlation between certain leadership traits or behaviors and positive teacher morale. Regardless of whether in the realm of elementary or secondary principal leadership, this review of teacher morale research seems to offer a clear message to principals: The principal has a critical hand in determining the outcomes of his or her school. In effecting positive changes or maintaining success, one of the most important areas of focus for a principal is that of teacher morale. It is incumbent upon those who hold this position to identify and develop methods to achieve and maintain positive teacher morale, because teacher morale has far-reaching and significant effects, especially with relation to the ultimate goal of education – namely, student achievement.