Building a Positive School Climate: What Principals Have Done to Effect Change, an Ethnographic Case Study

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Building a Positive School Climate: What Principals Have Done to Effect Change, an Ethnographic Case Study

by

Suzanne C. Showers

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
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Major: Educational Administration (UNL-UNO)

Under the Supervision of Professor Dr. Kent Mann

Lincoln, Nebraska
May, 2019
The importance of school climate has been known for over 100 years. School climate sets the tone for the teaching and learning interactions that take place within the school setting. “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (National School Climate Center, 2015). Research indicates that positive school climates increase teacher retention, lower dropout rates, decrease school violence, and increase student achievement (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Broad categories that contribute to school climate include safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and the institutional environment. Two additional dimensions of school climate that are specific to staff are leadership – creation and communication of a clear vision, accessible to and supportive of staff (including certificated and classified staff), providing staff development – and professional relationships – positive attitudes and relationships among staff that support working and learning together effectively (National School Climate Center, 2015). A widespread belief exists that the leadership of a school is central to the climate of a
school (Stoll, 2002), and “The behaviors of building level principals are linked to the climate of school buildings – effective leadership is critical” (Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). Organizational leaders set the tone for their staff and are responsible for instilling the implicit and explicit norms of behavior of a school’s climate (Cohen et al., 2009). In 1985, Blake and Mouton (as cited in Kelley et al., 2005) posited that leaders who possess a full understanding of leadership theory and are able to improve their leadership skills can reduce negative attitudes and employee frustration.

**KEY WORDS**: middle school, culture, climate, leadership strategies, principal
Dedication and Acknowledgments

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
--- Jeremiah 29:11

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” --- Philippians 4:6

Throughout this entire process, no two verses helped see me through to the finish line as much as these. I give thanks to God and his timing, which was often not mine.

To my husband, Perry. I’m not sure words can express my gratitude for your support along this journey. You’ve been there from the start. You are my biggest cheerleader, you knew when to push me and when to back off, you sacrificed your time so I could have mine, and you often put your needs to the side so I could see this dream come true. I could not have done this without you. I love you, always.

To Connor, Katlyn, and Callie. I hope you have seen the value of being a lifelong learner. I hope you have seen that if you set goals and work hard, you can achieve them. Thank you for often having to put things aside so that I could complete this journey. I am grateful to you.

To my family near and far – my parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins, in-laws, out-laws, and anyone I’ve forgotten. You have cheered me on and given me your support throughout this entire journey. I am grateful for your love and encouragement. Let’s get ready to celebrate!

To my graduate faculty and my doctoral committee – thank you. You all have pushed me to learn and grow as an educator and have given me such valuable insight and
wisdom along the way. To Kent Mann, my advisor and chair. Your steady support and
guidance to stay the course did not go unnoticed and was invaluable to my success. To
GiGi, I could not have asked for a better mentor as a woman in leadership. You set the
bar high and always had the faith in me that I could reach it. Thank you.

Finally, to all my friends and colleagues. I cannot possibly name everyone here,
but know that many of you were instrumental in my success. You gave advice, cheered,
pushed, poured wine, commiserated, celebrated, helped me set goals, supported,
encouraged, the list goes on. I am beyond blessed to have such a loving, powerful tribe
surrounding me.

Now, it’s time to celebrate!
Sue
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Importance of Study

This study is designed to help us better understand the leadership strategies middle school principals use to positively influence school climate in the short term, which ultimately creates a positive school culture for the long term. The growing body of literature on this subject indicates the importance that a positive and healthy climate has in the creation of an effective learning environment. These environments can help to increase teacher retention rates, improve student achievement, lower dropout rates, and reduce school violence. It is important to know what strategies are effective in shaping and promoting school climate so that policymakers, school leaders, and teacher educators (i.e., teacher preparation programs) can learn and develop these strategies for the benefit of the teaching and learning relationships in P-12 school buildings nationwide. The problem of practice this study attempts to address is how middle school principals change negative school climates, and develop and maintain positive school climates in order to influence the teaching and learning interactions that take place in their school.

Purpose of the Study

A review of the relevant literature consistently points to a gap in research focused on relating specific interventions to changes in school climate. The climate of a school is important, and building leaders are in a position to influence school climate. In an attempt to fill that gap, the purpose of this ethnographic case study is to understand how middle school principals transform schools with negative climates, and develop and
maintain positive climates in order to influence the teaching and learning interactions that take place in their school.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question:** What leadership strategies have middle school principals found successful for developing a positive school climate?

**Sub Questions:**

1. What role do principals believe leadership plays in promoting and shaping school climate?
2. What strategies have principals used to develop a positive school climate?
3. What strategies have principals used to improve a negative school climate?
4. What strategies have principals used to maintain a positive school climate?

**Researcher Positioning and Ethical Considerations**

Based on Neuman’s (2011) chapter about the meanings of methodology, philosophical foundations, and approaches to social science research, I would position myself as taking an interpretive social science approach to this study. It is constructivist in that there is, “An orientation toward social reality that assumes the beliefs and meaning that people create and use fundamentally shape what reality is for them” (p. 102) and it is practical in that it includes, “A pragmatic orientation toward social knowledge in which people apply knowledge in their daily lives; the value of knowledge is the ability to be integrated with a person’s practical everyday understandings and choices” (p. 107).

The majority of my teaching career has been spent working with secondary students, particularly in middle school. I have experienced both positive and negative
school climates in my line of work and have been on the receiving end of negativity from fellow staff members. One of my former schools has been somewhat of an impetus for my choosing this topic due to what I perceive as a negative and toxic culture that exists there. I have taken a graduate level class on school climate/culture and have also received training (first as an educator and then later as a facilitator) in the FISH! Philosophy for Schools which is a program aimed at creating a safe and supportive school climate focused on classroom management, engaged learning, positive behavior, and staff morale. These experiences have also helped to develop my interest in this topic.

Adult participant informed consent was obtained through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), and participant consent was documented. This was to ensure that the risks to participants were reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits and the advancement of knowledge, and that adequate safeguards were in place to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants. My CITI training is current. A sample copy of the informed consent form is included in the appendix.

**Definition of Terms:**

*Middle School*—For the purposes of this study, middle school will be defined as having a configuration of grades 6-8 situated in public school districts with a range of demographic characteristics (SES, diversity, mobility, etc.).

*Culture*—For the purposes of this study the term school culture will be used with the following definition:

Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront
challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools. (Peterson & Deal, 1998)

*Climate*—For the purposes of this study the term school climate will be used with the following definition: “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of school life experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning and leadership practices, and organizational structures” (National School Climate Council, 2007).

*Leadership strategies*—For the purposes of this study, leadership strategies will be defined as the development of a plan with specific actions to help learning communities flourish and bring about change (Tobia, 2009).

*Principal*—For the purposes of this study, principal will be defined as an individual who has met the required criteria, as outlined by the Nebraska Department of Education, for a standard administrative certificate or a professional administrative certificate. In the literature, occasionally principal is used interchangeably with administrator/school leader/educational leader.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Many definitions of school climate exist, and this term is often used interchangeably with school culture. Whether the term used is culture or climate, most definitions include terminology, concepts, or elements related to world view, framework, identity, uniqueness, history, people, context, customs, rituals, symbols, stories, language, relationships, unwritten/unspoken, codes, norms, values, beliefs. Some may say, “It is the way we do things around here.” For the purposes of this study, unless otherwise cited as culture, the term school climate will be used. Educational or school leader may also be used interchangeably with school principal.

Principals can promote or suppress a positive school climate through their leadership philosophy, model, and strategies. School climate is created through expectations, values, faith, relationships, and behavior. It is the direction of the principal. It is the prevailing atmosphere of the school, the “heart and soul” if you will, and is, hopefully, indicative of a healthy place of learning – it can be felt. School climates are not random; they are established and maintained. A positive school climate makes teachers and students want to be there every day, ready and willing to learn. Factors that contribute to school climate include the quality of interactions, the personality of the school, environmental factors, academic performance, safety and school size, and trust and respect. There are times that school climate and school culture are used interchangeably. It is worth spending some time reviewing the distinctions found in the literature. Culture tends to be more about shared assumptions and ideology, whereas
climate is about shared behaviors; culture is more abstract, and climate is more concrete; culture is more about the long-term, and climate is more about the short-term. The following chart is useful in reviewing distinctions between the two at a glance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture . . .</th>
<th>Climate . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>. . . is the group’s personality</td>
<td>. . . is the group’s attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . gives Mondays permission to be miserable</td>
<td>. . . differs from Monday to Friday, February to May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . provides for a limited way of thinking</td>
<td>. . . creates a state of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . takes years to evolve</td>
<td>. . . is easy to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . is based on values and beliefs</td>
<td>. . . is based on perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . can’t be felt, even by group members</td>
<td>. . . can be felt when you enter a room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . is part of us</td>
<td>. . . surrounds us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . is “the way we do things around here”</td>
<td>. . . is “the way we feel around here”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. . . determines whether or not improvement is possible</td>
<td>. . . is the first thing that improves when positive change is made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gruenert and Whitaker (2015)

Figure 1. Distinguishing climate from culture.

David Hargreaves (1995) puts forth a model in which school culture is based on two dimensions: the instrumental domain (social control and orientation to task) and the expressive domain (social cohesion through positive relationships). According to his model, four types of ineffective school cultures exist: traditional (low social cohesion, high social control), welfarist (low social control, high social cohesion), hothouse (high social control, high social cohesion), and anomic (low social cohesion, low social
control) (Hargreaves, 1995). In the “anomic” culture teachers feel insecure, alienated, isolated, and “at risk.” Stoll and Fink (1996) also examined school cultures in terms of effectiveness-ineffectiveness, and improving-declining. Their model produces five school cultures: moving (effective and improving), cruising (effective and declining), strolling (at the intersection of effective-ineffective and improving-declining), struggling (ineffective and improving), and sinking (ineffective and declining). The “sinking” culture is more specifically described as being ineffective (norms of isolation, blame, self-reliance, and loss of faith), having staff unable to change, being located in deprived areas where parenting or unprepared children are blamed, and needing dramatic action and significant support (Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Andy Hargreaves (1994) describes four different teaching cultures: individualism, collaboration, contrived collegiality, and balkanisation. Individualism is characterized by autonomy, isolation, and an avoidance of blame and support. Collaboration is characterized by working together, sharing ideas and materials, and reflective inquiry. Contrived collegiality is characterized by fixed times and places for planning and collaboration, and an external agenda. Smaller collaborative groups characterize balkanisation with teachers neither isolated nor working together as a whole. Stoll and Fink (1996) identified ten cultural norms of an effective school – shared goals, responsibility for success, collegiality, continuous improvement, lifelong learning, risk-taking, support, mutual respect, openness, and celebration and humor. One, in particular, collegiality, is best summed up as “we’re working on this together.” More specifically it refers to “mutual sharing and assistance; an orientation towards the school as a whole;
and is spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, unscheduled, and unpredictable” (Stoll, 2002, p. 10). This cultural norm is often threatened by departmental divisions and the formation of subcultures within a school.

A study by Jurasaitė-Harbison and Rex (2010) examined professional relationships as one component of school culture. They state, “School traditions, physical environments, and organizational arrangement each play noteworthy roles in creating opportunities for informal learning. They provide cultural contexts for the professional relationships through which collaborative learning can occur” (Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex, 2010, p. 273). Their study indicates that professional relationships in American schools are friendly but not collegial and that social isolation seems to be inherent to the profession in America. Teachers in their study were reluctant to talk about individual trial and error experiences and were deeply concerned with protecting their professional identity from damage (Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex, 2010). One participant reported trying to help a colleague and that, not only was she turned down, the colleague then went and made negative comments about her behind her back. Her words were, “Attitude affects everything” (Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex, 2010, p. 274). In sharp contrast, the Lithuanian teachers in the study reported a feeling of belonging at school, that school was a part of their lifestyle, and spoke with pride and affection about their school. Their school culture embraced high professional standards, opportunities for learning and professional growth, and collegial support, and did not tolerate a lack of dedication and motivation for improvement (Jurasaitė-Harbison & Rex, 2010).

Conversely, the American school in the study presented a culture where teachers were not
inclined to build collaborative learning relationships and instead continued to act independently of one another.

Beaudoin (2011) addresses the notion of respect in schools and indicates that staff members’ well-being and professional relationships are factors that can give us some control and influence over creating a respectful school culture. She states, “where staff members are burned out, unhappy, stressed and resentful. Such feelings often lead them to be impatient with and disrespectful of their students” (Beaudoin, 2011, p. 40). Teachers who consistently engage in what she calls “problem-saturated” conversations tend to see students, and each other, in increasingly negative ways. Unknowingly over time, the adults in the building start to become less tolerant and kind. She writes that another factor that contributes to poor staff climate is cliques and gossip. Cliques imply a disconnection from the rest of the staff (and thereby exclude certain people and put down others) and are especially problematic when they have a strong negative voice (Beaudoin, 2011). Gossip and cliques promote feelings of isolation and disconnectedness, and suppress feelings of trust, collaboration, and openness. How are leaders to combat a sense of underappreciation and negativity in staff relationships so that they can create a stimulating, positive, supportive, respectful school culture rather than a draining one? As Deal and Peterson (2009) write, “When a school is mired in a noxious past and dysfunctional present it is hard to envision a more promising future” (p. 166) (see Figure 2).
A positive and sustained school climate has been shown to promote student academic achievement, healthy development of students, and teacher retention (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2008) (see Figure 3).

Despite our knowing all this, we have yet to translate the effects of school climate into school accountability systems. School climate data is one way to promote staff, family, and student engagement in the hopes of enhancing social, emotional, ethical, civic, and intellectual skills (Cohen et al., 2008). School climate can be assessed in a variety of ways: focus groups, observation, interviews, town hall meetings, study circles, participatory action research, and surveys. The research community and the National School Climate Council (2007) are in agreement that school climate is shaped by four major factors: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and institutional environment. These four essential dimensions are further defined as follows: 1. safety – rules and...
norms, physical safety, and social and emotional security; 2. teaching and learning – support for learning, and social and civic learning; 3. interpersonal relationships – respect for diversity, social support-adults, and social supports-students; 4. institutional environment – school connectedness/engagement, and physical surroundings (Cohen et al., 2008). Furthermore, school climate data can help inform the following: guiding school improvement efforts, supporting shared leadership and learning, and promoting school-family-community partnerships (see Figure 4).
A supportive learning environment is one in which the school climate is characterized by reasonable expectations for behavior, consistent and fair application of rules and regulations, and caring responsive relationships among the members of the school community (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Such environments have warm and inviting classrooms, purposeful and engaging learning activities, and are places where students feel valued and honored and are willing to take academic risks (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). These school climates are also described as safe, orderly learning environments.

Creating and sustaining a positive school climate has long been regarded as a critical task for educational leaders in order to improve student achievement (Price & Moolenaar, 2015). Research in the last 10+ years has seen a growth in the number of studies dedicated to exploring the relationships between district leaders, principals, and teachers. Even though there has been more focus on the social relationships of teachers,
less attention has been given to the relationships between principals and their staff (Price & Moolenaar, 2015). Further, Price and Moolenaar (2015) write, “there is limited understanding of the nature, quality, and importance of principal-teacher relationships for successful school learning climates” (n. p.).

The effectiveness of a school is largely determined by the interaction patterns among teachers and administrators. Fear and distrust in working relationships within a school can negatively affect teachers’ commitment, motivation, confidence, and perceptions (Rafferty, 2003). School climate determines what a school is and what it might become. The climate is what sets the tone for resolving problems, developing trust and respect, attitudes within the school, and generating new ideas (Rafferty, 2003).

Research has indicated a positive correlation between the leadership style and personality of the principal and the openness or “closedness” of a school. In Rafferty’s (2003) study he found the differences in teachers’ perceived upward communication supportiveness of the principal between open and closed climate schools had to do with how easy the principal made it for them to do their work, how free they felt in talking to the principal, how encouraging the principal was for them to share both good and bad information, and how much they felt the principal understood them.

In 1966, Halpin (as cited in Rapti, 2013) described six different types of climates that can exist in schools: open, controlled, autonomous, paternal, familiar, and closed. An **open** climate is reflective of a principal who is supportive of staff members, is welcoming and positive toward teachers’ ideas, is devoted to his/her work, and is concerned for his/her staff. Teachers in an open climate demonstrate collective efficacy
in that they work in teams to achieve student success, and maintain close relationships with students and parents. Dedication to the accomplishment of tasks, rather than social aspects, is indicative of a controlled climate. Principals are generally distant from teachers and family engagement is discouraged. Teachers have a considerable amount of freedom to act in an autonomous climate. Teachers are motivated to teach, and students are motivated to learn in this type of climate. Staff, students, and parents enjoy close relationships. Paternal climates are ones in which the principal is hard-working, but does not necessarily have any influence on the staff. Teachers are somewhat open to approaching one another but are cautious of approaching the principal, whose leadership style leans toward autocratic. A familiar climate can be described as “laissez-faire,” or, “let them do it.” Many teachers are not committed to their task, students do not take their learning seriously, parents are not involved, teachers do not support the principal’s leadership, and there is little concern for the overall performance of the school. A lack of commitment, respect, and productivity are the hallmarks of a closed climate. The principal is unsupportive, controlling, inattentive, and uncaring. Teachers are frustrated, ineffective, and divided amongst themselves. Students do not have positive attitudes toward school or their learning and are not achieving.

Loukas (2007) states, “The feelings and attitudes that are elicited by a school’s environment are referred to as the school climate” (n. p.). How the members of a school community feel about their school is reflective of their attitudes, behaviors, and norms. She goes on to describe school climate as a multidimensional construct that includes the following: physical dimension, social dimension, and academic dimension (Loukas,
2007). The **physical** dimension is comprised of the appearance of the school, class size and student to teacher ratio, classroom order and organization, resources available, and safety and comfort. The **social** dimension is made up of the quality of interpersonal relationships among all members of the school community, the equitable and fair treatment of all members of the school community, the degree of comparison and competition between students, and the degree all members of the school community contribute to decision-making in the school. The **academic** dimension entails the quality of instruction at the school, teacher expectation of student achievement, and monitoring of student progress and reporting results to all stakeholders.

The link between positive school climate and school success has been demonstrated through research over time. The Manitoba Education and Training department (2001) identified and summarized the following key factors that contribute to the creation of a positive school climate:

- Continuous academic and social growth.
- Respect – students and staff have high self-esteem and are considerate of others.
- Trust – a sense that people can be counted on.
- High morale – students and staff feel good about being there.
- Cohesiveness – a sense of belonging.
- Opportunities for input – being able to contribute ideas and participate.
- Renewal – an openness to change and improvement.
- Caring – students and staff feel that others are concerned about them.
- Program curriculum, activities, and policies.
- Process teaching and learning styles, problem-solving, and communication.
- Resources, materials, and school facilities.

Figure 5 further delineates factors that contribute to a positive school climate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Social/Emotional Environment</th>
<th>The Learning Environment</th>
<th>The Physical Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students are accepted and welcomed.</td>
<td>High and appropriate expectations are in place for all students.</td>
<td>The school is perceived as inviting – a place students want to come to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive behavior is modeled by staff.</td>
<td>Learning is perceived as interesting, relevant, and important.</td>
<td>The school is well maintained and repaired as necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students and staff are treated with respect and dignity.</td>
<td>All students are expected to learn and grow based on their individual abilities and skill levels.</td>
<td>The school is accessible to all students including those with physical disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual differences in students and staff are respected.</td>
<td>Procedures are in place to address individual learning needs.</td>
<td>The school has an appropriate intercom, phone system, and an emergency backup system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and community members are welcomed in the school.</td>
<td>School and classroom rules are developed with input from staff, parents, and students.</td>
<td>The physical systems of the school are in good working order, e.g., air, heat, lighting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are meaningfully involved in the school.</td>
<td>The school and classroom provide opportunities for a high degree of student involvement.</td>
<td>The school is equipped with a variety of detection systems and alarms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness is fostered in all students.</td>
<td>Teachers build a team atmosphere in the school and classroom.</td>
<td>The area around the school is well landscaped and maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility is developed in all students.</td>
<td>Staff anticipates problems and deals with them before they escalate.</td>
<td>Graffiti removal procedures are in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students feel accepted and welcomed.</td>
<td>Staff establishes structure and routine in the school and classroom.</td>
<td>School equipment is inspected on a regular basis, e.g., playground, gymnasium, lunchroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 continues
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Social/Emotional Environment</th>
<th>The Learning Environment</th>
<th>The Physical Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differences in culture, race, religion, and ethnicity are recognized and appreciated.</td>
<td>Parents are kept informed of their children’s program and progress.</td>
<td>Noise levels in the school are monitored and treated when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students are actively involved in school activities.</td>
<td>Teachers and parents work collaboratively.</td>
<td>The school and classrooms are equipped with interesting bulletin boards and display cases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school has a vision and mission statement.</td>
<td>Teachers encourage a positive and optimistic approach to learning.</td>
<td>Appropriate signage is displayed in the school and on the playground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school has introduced measures to ensure it is safe and caring.</td>
<td>Teachers establish rapport with each student.</td>
<td>Specialty rooms/areas are available and well equipped, e.g., staff rooms, meeting rooms, first aid area, therapy rooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff has developed programs and initiatives to ensure all students feel they belong.</td>
<td>A proactive approach to discipline is used.</td>
<td>Classrooms are equipped with quality desks, shelving, storage area, and learning centers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency procedures are in place to ensure a safe and secure school.</td>
<td>Teachers use effective practices and current curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The principal is a strong educational leader, who involves the staff, parents, and students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manitoba Education, Training and Youth (2001)

*Figure 5.* Key factors for a positive school climate.

In 1987, Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp developed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire – Rutgers Secondary (OCDQ-RS) for secondary schools to measure five dimensions of school climate:

1. Supportive principal behavior – motivate teachers through constructive criticism and modeling hard work, helpful and concerned about personal and professional welfare of teachers, supportive of staff social needs and task achievement.
2. Directive principal behavior – rigid and domineering, close and constant control over all activities associated with the teaching and learning in the school.
3. Engaged teacher behavior – high faulty morale, teachers are proud of the school and support one another, teachers enjoy working together and are committed to student achievement, teachers display a sense of collective efficacy and academic optimism.
4. Frustrated teacher behavior – teachers and administrators demonstrate a pattern of interference that distracts and disrupts the basic tasks of teaching and learning, there is an excessive amount of routine and nonteaching duties and paperwork, and teachers irritate and annoy one another.
5. Intimate teacher behavior – staff enjoy strong and cohesive social relationships, they know each other well and socialize together. (Kottkamp, Mulhern, & Hoy, 1987)

Von Frank (2009) describes The School Climate Index as including 4 subscales:
collegial leadership – the principal is kind, supportive, concerned about teachers, maintains standards and expectations, open to change and new ideas, and listens to differing opinions; teacher professionalism – teachers respect one another’s expertise, are concerned with student achievement and are engaged in their teaching, are open, cooperative, and friendly, and support one another; academic press – the school strives for excellence, is focused on academics, maintains high but attainable goals for students, and respects accomplishments and hard work; and community engagement – a constructive relationship exists with the between the community and the school, the school enjoys support and involvement from parents and community members, the school shares information about its accomplishments with the community. A positive school climate is one in which staff and leaders have created trusting relationships which in turn creates an effective teaching and learning environment (Von Frank, 2009).

Their review of research indicates that focusing on improving school climate leads to increased student engagement with the curriculum and academic achievement, a decrease in problem behaviors, a decrease in teacher turnover rates, and an increase in teacher satisfaction. This guide outlines five activity sets for improving school climate and includes resources for each:

1. planning for school climate improvements,
2. engaging stakeholders in school climate improvements,
3. collecting and reporting school climate data,
4. choosing and implementing school climate interventions, and
5. monitoring and evaluating the overall effort.

The key components of each are summarized in Figure 6.

A growing number of students and teachers report feeling unsafe in their school environments, both physically and social-emotionally. Often this is the result of breakdowns in the interpersonal and contextual components that make up a school’s climate (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D’Alessandro, & Guffey, 2012). Connectedness to school matters for teachers and students for effective teaching and learning to take place. Work environment, peer relationships, and feelings of inclusion and respect have all been shown in the research as important aspects of school climate (Thapa et al., 2012). One of the most important dimensions of school climate is teaching and learning – a positive school climate improves the ability of students to learn and increases teachers’ commitment to the profession and strengthens their belief that they can have a positive
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning for School Climate Improvements</th>
<th>Engaging Stakeholders in School Climate Improvements</th>
<th>Collecting and Reporting School Climate Data</th>
<th>Choosing and Implementing School Climate Interventions</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluating the Overall Effort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a core planning team</td>
<td>Disseminate key messaging</td>
<td>Finalize measures/confirm survey instrument</td>
<td>Review current interventions</td>
<td>Plan to assess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate school climate improvement</td>
<td>Obtain stakeholder input</td>
<td>Collect data</td>
<td>Review potential interventions</td>
<td>Get stakeholder input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a vision and logic model</td>
<td>Build a shared understanding</td>
<td>Analyze data</td>
<td>Determine interventions to implement</td>
<td>Identify leading indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for data collection and analysis</td>
<td>Share information about the importance of data</td>
<td>Use additional resources</td>
<td>Address logistics</td>
<td>Collect additional data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a communication plan</td>
<td>Develop family-school-community partnerships</td>
<td>Allow stakeholders to review data</td>
<td>Implement interventions</td>
<td>Prepare a year-end report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to routinize practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to differentiate supports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Figure 6. Components for improving school climate.*
impact on student learning (Thapa et al., 2012). Many teachers leave teaching because they do not feel supported by administration and because they feel as though they have no influence or opportunity to participate in decision-making at the building level (Cohen et al., 2009). Induction of new teachers must be into a positive and healthy school climate. When school leaders know what to do to support teachers in their work, and teachers, in turn, perceive and appreciate that support, school climates remain healthy (Cohen et al., 2009).

In their 2009 article, “School climate: research, policy, practice, and teacher education,” Cohen and colleagues explicitly state, “we have underscored the glaring gap between research on the one hand, and school climate policy, practice guidelines, and teacher education on the other” (p. 207) and “Today, we have not translated school climate research findings into policy, school improvement practice guidelines, or teacher education efforts” (p. 207).
Chapter 3

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach to gain insight into and describe the strategies that middle school principals implement to influence the climate of a building to make it a more effective learning environment. Leadership strategies were the central theme that required exploration and understanding. The nature of the target phenomenon (i.e., leadership strategies) was most closely aligned with Merriam’s (2009) description of the basics of qualitative studies: focus on meaning, understanding, and process; purposeful sampling; inductive and comparative data analysis; and rich description of findings and development of themes and categories (p. 38).

Research Design

The chosen approach was an ethnographic case study (as it related to schools). This approach blended elements of ethnography and case study in an effort to provide in-depth descriptions of shared beliefs, values, behaviors, issues, and strategies in similar educational communities. Ethnographies (long used by anthropologists) have been a part of education research since at least the 1980s and were one of the first qualitative approaches to be adapted to the study of schools (Lichtman, 2013). The “unit of analysis” in both ethnographies and case studies is society and culture (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Both are research strategies utilized in a constructivist theoretical paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and both approaches are focused on developing themes and generating thick descriptions. An ethnography seeks to situate an individual’s story within the context of their culture and culture-sharing group; a case
study seeks to illustrate an issue while providing a detailed description of the setting for
the case (Creswell, 2013). Parthasarathy (2008) states,

While a full-fledged ethnography typically demands long-term engagement in the
field, ethnographic case studies can be conducted over shorter spans of time to
explore narrower fields of interest to help generate hypotheses. But the critical
feature of ethnography — seeking to contextualize the problem in wider contexts
— also extends to ethnographic case studies. (n. p.)

Schools are a culture-sharing group which supported the ethnography aspect of
the study. Gaining an in-depth understanding of principal leadership behaviors (and
analyzing them) when faced with a negative school climate and/or when developing and
maintaining a positive school climate was the case study aspect. This blended approach
was useful in the research process because the study sought to describe the settings
principals are working in (“schools” - that would encompass shared culture and context)
as well as the issues they are facing (negative and/or positive school climates) and their
experiences/strategies used in dealing with them (their story). The literature suggests that
two dimensions of school climate – leadership and professional relationships – are central
to working and learning together effectively. These principals served as a “group of
cases” that shared common characteristics and conditions. The ethnographic component
was relevant because part of what was attempted to be studied was the broader picture of
the climate and how that sets the tone for the teaching and learning interactions that take
place within the school setting. The case study component was relevant because the
study sought to learn and understand what the issues are that are facing principals and
what they are doing about it. The intent was not necessarily to generalize to the larger
population but to develop an in-depth exploration and understanding of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

A pilot study was conducted in early spring, 2016 to refine the interview questions, refine the research study protocol, and gain insight into potential themes. Two middle school principals were interviewed who had experience with the phenomenon being studied (transforming school climates). These principals had at least three consecutive years of experience as a principal in their respective current buildings, and both were placed at their buildings to address existing issues and “turn things around” (my words, not theirs). Participants were recruited via contact with the director for secondary education at a local school district. Principal #1 was a male in his 6th year at a school where there were 645 students enrolled and 82 total staff. The building had a 60% minority population, 19% mobility rate, and 79% of students were eligible for free/reduced meals. Principal #2 was a female in her 3rd year at a school where there were 746 students enrolled and 85 total staff. The building had a 52% minority population, 15% mobility rate, and 75% of students were eligible for free/reduced meals.

For the pilot study, data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews (approximately 25 minutes in length using an abbreviated interview protocol) that were audiotaped in the participants’ offices. I took notes, listened to the interview recordings, compared the participants’ answers, and looked for themes. Early emerging themes included the following: principals define school climate as “the ability to collaborate” to ensure student achievement; principals believe school climate plays an important role in having a safe and effective learning environment and it is something
they work on actively to build; staff relationships within a building set the tone for teaching and learning interactions, and those relationships have a definite influence, both positively and negatively, on school climate; and principals must feel comfortable leading in a climate of change. Some of the strategies described to address school climate issues included moving staff (one principal said, “An ineffective teacher makes everyone’s job harder”), creating forums that allow people to express their frustrations but that focus on finding solutions, identifying and recruiting positive staff members and placing them on committees and in leadership positions, creating systems for celebration and recognition, and finding ways for staff to have “agency” and participate in shared decision making.

**Population and Sample**

For this study, a purposeful sampling frame of all middle school principals in Nebraska was created using the Nebraska Department of Education website. The list was narrowed to include eligible participants using the following parameters: must have had at least 3 consecutive years of experience as a principal in a building (not necessarily their current building) and the building must be a grades 6-8 configuration. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed to 67 middle school principals across the state of Nebraska. Of the 67 invitations sent, 10 principals were chosen to participate in the study. Signed informed consent was obtained for each participant, and a copy of the consent form is included in Appendix B. Each middle school and principal was given a corresponding pseudonym to protect identity and ensure confidentiality. School 1 was Alpha Middle School, School 2 was Bravo Middle School, and so on. Demographics of the stratified sample are shown in Table 1.
Table 1

*Sample Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of years as principal at the building</th>
<th># of students enrolled*</th>
<th>% minority population*</th>
<th>% mobility rate*</th>
<th>% eligible for free/reduced meals*</th>
<th># of total certified staff*</th>
<th>Population of community+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bravo Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>51,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo Middle School</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxtrot Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4,187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf Middle School</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>284,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>284,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliette Middle School</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4,488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data taken from the Nebraska Department of Education website for the 2017-2018 school year.
+Data taken from the 2017 US Census.
The average years of experience as a building principal was 15, with a range of 5 – 29 years. The average enrollment was 505 students, with a range of 177 – 771 students. The average minority population was 26%, with a range of 6 – 74%. The average mobility rate was 7%, with a range of 2.5 – 17%. The average eligible for free/reduced meals was 44%, with a range of 4 – 85%. The average number of certificated staff was 38, with a range of 15 – 62 certificated staff. The two female principals who participated in this study represent 20% of my study sample, which is representative of the eligible sample population (out of the 67 middle school principals in Nebraska that were eligible to participate, 12 are female, which is 18%). The average population of the communities was 71,015, with a range of 577 – 284,736 people. Five of the schools in the study were situated in communities of 5,000 people or less, and the remaining five schools were situated in communities of 20,000 people or more. Two of the schools were considered to be adjacent to metropolitan areas.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, data were collected using semi-structured interviews (21-64 minutes in length using an abbreviated interview protocol) that were audiotaped in the participant’s offices. Nine interviews were conducted on-site; one interview was conducted over the phone. The open-ended interview questions are provided in Appendix A. I took notes during the interviews, later transcribed the interviews verbatim, then compared the participants’ answers, and looked for themes. When available, a walkthrough of the building with the principal was conducted to triangulate the respondents’ answers and gain further evidence of the leadership strategies being
utilized. Only two walkthroughs were able to be completed as the interviews primarily took place during the summer months when school was not in session. During the walkthroughs, I completed a semi-structured observational checklist. Parts of the checklist were still able to be completed based on the respondents’ answers if a walkthrough did not occur. The walkthrough protocol is included in Appendix C. When available, physical artifacts were also examined, and photographs of the artifacts were taken to aid in later data analysis. These photographs from 4 schools are also included in Appendix D.

I coded each participant’s interview responses in order to identify key themes (within case). I used a flexible standard of categories and a constant comparative method which allowed me to refine, expand, and delete themes or categories as I proceeded through the data analysis across participant settings (cross case).
Chapter 4

Findings

This study examined how middle school principals transform schools with negative climates and develop and maintain positive climates in order to influence the teaching and learning interactions that take place in their school. More specifically the following research questions were addressed: What role do principals believe leadership plays in promoting and shaping school climate?; What strategies have principals used to develop a positive school climate?; What strategies have principals used to improve a negative school climate?; and What strategies have principals used to maintain a positive school climate?

Defining School Climate

Each interview started with asking the principal to define school climate in their terms. One principal said, “I think a lot of it is trusting relationships . . . I think when you have trust and positive relationships among staff, administration, students, in between all of those different groups of people I would say a climate would be positive.” Another echoed, “For me it’s how we treat each other, it’s how staff interacts with staff, with parents, kids, visitors, administrators, vice versa.” The Golf Middle School principal explained it as,

whereas climate, from my perspective, that is . . . changing all the time . . . it’s how people feel . . . is vulnerable to external forces . . . is the mood of the school . . . is influenced by your culture.

Other principals talked about climate in terms of a shared vision of the school and what the goals of the school are, how students are responding to the school, teachers teaching
and students learning, having high expectations, and the general atmosphere of the school.

**Strengths and Challenges of Building Climate**

Principals were also asked to describe what the climate of the building was like at the time when they became principal, what was going well, and what were some of the challenges they faced. Seven principals specifically talked about having a building staff that had pride in their school and community, were committed to the building, and loved and worked hard for kids. Four principals described themselves as fortunate that they came into a building with a strong positive culture already established. Other positives included national recognition of the school, hope and excitement surrounding opening new facilities or the separation of facilities (i.e., separation of a middle school from a high school), use of character education programs, strong daily attendance by staff and students, ability to work with a veteran staff, and strong community values/norms that were reflected in the school.

The respondents shared a wide variety of challenges with each school having almost their own unique challenges. A few commonalities were noted: four principals talked specifically about the challenge of high rates of staff turnover and hiring and retaining qualified teaching staff, and four principals talked about the challenge of staff mistrust because of staff being unsure of the direction of the school with a change in leadership or because of inconsistency in leadership. Other challenges included financial struggles in the district, shifts in student demographics, transitioning to the middle level philosophy and middle school configuration (grades 6-8), working with “tough kids,” not
being focused on achievement and not making Annual Yearly Progress, staff not living in the community in which the school they teach in is located, sharing teaching staff and facilities, opening or re-opening a school, veteran staff being very resistant to implementing change, difficulty maintaining momentum because of staff turnover or staff resistance, weak connections with parents and the community, the perceived negative influence of nearby communities on the school and its norms, and the use of technology and social media and the lack of proper training. The Juliette Middle School principal knew what his challenge was when he was hired saying, “When I was hired I knew very clearly what the board was expecting of me and what the superintendent was expecting of me as well, and that was to re-establish management of the school and the discipline of students and the expectations of teachers.”

**Role of Leadership in School Climate**

When asked about the importance of leadership in promoting and shaping school climate all principals agreed that it was a vital part of their job, that their role is to act as a guide to influence the climate, to model and “set the tone,” to set expectations, and that it requires deliberate focus. “The important part of leadership in shaping school climate is getting the right people hired, supporting the good ideas the teachers have that change climate in the school, and then addressing the issues of negativity whenever you possibly can,” stated the Delta Middle School principal. In regards to the level of importance, the Echo Middle School principal stated, “Primary importance. It’s at the very top of the list. I think that the leader sets the tone . . . it impacts the whole environment completely.” The Golf Middle School principal echoed that saying,
So the leader, truly, their values and beliefs and their dispositions have a significant influence over what happens at the school no matter what . . . the leader is the model and they set the tone, and so I think climate is so dependent upon our relationships and how we communicate. . . .

The Alpha Middle School principal mentioned building trust, being visible, and deliberately focusing on climate as important parts of his role. “I want to establish the climate through leadership as one where I’m accessible, I’m visible, and I’m there for kids and staff,” stated the Juliette Middle School principal.

**Goals for School Climate**

Principals were also asked about what goals they had in terms of promoting and shaping a positive climate for their school. The principal at Charlie Middle School indicated they had a climate goal as a part of their school improvement plan every year. As a staff, they developed “learning principles” and “guidelines for professional interactions.” These artifacts are included in Appendix D. He said, “we wrote those as a group, and what we all believed in. . . .” At Delta Middle School the principal described his goals saying,

My goal when I come into this school is to make sure that every kid has me saying “hello” to them and I know their name. And I’m ever present going out in the hallways roaming around to classrooms so kids see me all the time. I try to model what I believe which is building a relationship with the kids is the most important.

The primary goal for the principal at Golf Middle School right now is working intentionally on teaching her leaders how to attend to climate and culture and build the capacity of others to create highly functional teams. Four principals mentioned the issue of safety with the Hotel Middle School principal stating,
I think one of the things we want to do is to create a safe environment for people, we want them to feel like they belong, they fit, and they can make a contribution to the environment, we want them to be able to be open to collaboration, and so our intent is trying to build those relationships.

**Strategies for Developing/Maintaining Positive School Climate**

Principals were next asked to share strategies or plans they have implemented to develop and/or maintain a positive school climate. At Alpha Middle school, they partnered with HumanEx to study the engagement and satisfaction of every single staff member in their building and also to learn about each person’s strengths and how to utilize them. The building then set goals and created an action plan which is included in Appendix D. The strengths were shared with individuals and teams so people could learn about each other, build relationships, and develop teacher leaders with the hope of increasing employee engagement with their job. The principals at Delta, Echo, and Golf middle schools also discussed developing teacher leaders in their buildings as a strategy to promote a positive climate. The Delta Middle School principal talked about one of his teachers organizing a new way to do the first day of school, and he said all he had to do was “stay out of her way” because what she was proposing was going to have such a positive impact on their school climate. The Echo Middle School principal said almost the same thing, “And so my role as a leader I feel is to provide, nurture, deliver what they need and then get out of their way.” She went on to say, “And so my goal is to really tap into the resources particularly of my staff and find out what their strengths are and capitalize on those strengths.”

Recognition of staff and students was something the principals at Alpha, Bravo, Golf, and India middle schools said also helped contribute to a positive school climate.
The principal at Bravo Middle School talked about having weekly challenges with staff (e.g., send in a video of use of a selected strategy in their classroom) and drawing for a prize from names that were entered. Bravo Middle School also uses blogs, podcasts, and their Facebook page to feature and recognize each of their classrooms. The Alpha Middle School principal says he and his assistant principal write recognition notes after visiting classrooms as an action step for their climate goal of, “I received meaningful recognition in the last 10 days.” They are working to find ways to systematize that recognition for all staff (certified and classified) and students in the building. At Golf Middle School the principal said, “the most powerful thing you can do is recognize and reinforce people’s work . . . explicitly reinforce and recognize the expectations or why that person’s valuable in their work . . . .” India Middle School has focused on student recognition in a variety of ways for academic achievement and positive behavior.

As previously mentioned, as part of their school climate goal, the Charlie Middle School staff developed “guidelines for professional interactions” which had four main components: positive attitude, effective communication, build positive relationships, and professional accountability. Each component had action steps for each such as project positive body language and eye contact, accept differences in viewpoint and personality, paraphrase for clarity, keep tone respectful, model with colleagues what we expect from students, follow agenda, and be aware of confidentiality issues. Again, these guidelines are included in Appendix D. Similarly, the Golf Middle School principal shared, “within that collaboration though you need to have some structures in place, so we do a lot of
work with defining roles and purpose and we use norms to operate with. . .” Delta Middle School also developed a “Model of Instruction” (included in Appendix D) as an agreed upon set of guidelines of what they should and shouldn’t see happening in the school.

Golf, Charlie, India, and Foxtrot middle schools all recognized the importance of providing opportunities and time for staff to connect and build relationships with one another. The Bravo Middle School principal also said that as a school they recognized how important social-emotional learning is for kids, so they put 20 minutes into their daily schedule during an advisor/advisee time. An additional strategy mentioned by the principals at Golf and Hotel middle schools is the use of restorative practices in their building to help build relationships between staff, and between staff and students.

**Strategies for Improving a Negative School Climate**

Principals were next asked to share strategies or plans they’ve implemented to improve a negative school climate. Often some of the same strategies principals described for developing and/or maintaining a positive school climate were also used for improving a negative school climate such as developing teacher leaders and providing time for staff to be together and connect. The strategy mentioned most often had to do with hiring “good” candidates coupled with addressing negative or ineffective teachers. The principals at Delta, Charlie, Foxtrot, India, and Juliette middle schools all talked about addressing negativity head on and right away. The discussed the importance of working with negative and/or ineffective staff members. Having agreed upon guidelines, such as the ones at Delta and Charlie middle schools helped guide those conversations.
The Delta Middle School principal said, “So if I see negative things are taking place, then I draw them back to what they said, this is what we said, this is what we’re doing. . . .”

The Charlie Middle School principal also spoke about their expectations of how they were going to interact with each other saying, “it helped us, I think . . . our guidelines, it was easy because if we had a challenge from that side, I could pull a staff member in, have it circled, and say, ‘I have a concern about. . . .’” He, along with the Foxtrot Middle School principal, also expressed the importance of supporting staff if they are having a difficult time. The Foxtrot principal said,

then you need to take on that problem and fix it, whether it be removing somebody or giving them a timeframe and a set of things they need to know and that needs to happen in x amount of time, and here’s some resources that might help you or some people that can, but it’s a non-negotiable, this can’t happen anymore.

The principal at India Middle School echoed that saying,

Teachers matter, they’re first . . . when I first got into education people said, ‘well gosh this teacher’s been in the business forever, no way you can get rid of them’, and I’m like, ‘why can’t you?’, and it’s not that I want to get rid of them, I want to help them get better, and I want to help them know how to teach kids.

“You can prevent a lot of negative school climate by making sure that you have . . . hired the best person . . . ,” said the Juliette principal.

Another strategy the Delta Middle school principal has used is placing his teachers strategically in collaborative teams based on elements of Marzano’s research, and he changes the teams each year.

and I take these really strong teachers and I pull those that are the outliers and I throw them in with the strong teachers. And then I try to mix them so they can get some influence from these strong teachers so that they can hopefully come around.
A picture of their team board is included in Appendix D.

The principals at Charlie, Golf, and India middle schools also reiterated the importance of relationships and ensuring that people feel they belong as a way to address (or even prevent) a negative school climate. Beyond using the professional interaction guidelines at Charlie Middle School, the principal stated,

> do I think climate is important, yeah, I think if you talk to any of our staff at Charlie they would say that was important to Principal Charlie. He wants you to feel welcomed into the building, he wants you to feel part of the team, and a part of our Charlie family.

The Golf principal focuses on reinforcing and recognizing whether or not people feel valued. She spends the majority of her time on teachers saying, “because from my opinion in what we really do, if teachers are positive then your classrooms are going to be positive, they’re the leverage point for me. . . .” She goes on to say,

> but ultimately I think climate is so connected to, it’s the relationships that we have with people . . . if you have positive and healthy relationships with people then you’re going to have a positive climate, but if you don’t attend to relationships and that, then your climate is going to be pretty negative.

Similarly, the India principal said,

> I needed to have an open door policy and I needed to connect with people and show that I had a general interest in their well-being . . . you gotta walk alongside of people, you can’t sit in this chair and dictate out.

**Transforming School Climate**

Principals were asked to share what they thought to be effective/successful in transforming school climate, and also what has not been effective/unsuccessful in transforming school climate. Basically, what works and what doesn’t work. Again, there was much overlap of strategies for developing/maintaining a positive school climate and
addressing a negative school climate. The Alpha Middle School principal reiterated the value in having done the climate study at his school. It gave them some data and a tool to work from in identifying people’s strengths and also in developing some school goals and an action plan. Along that same line, seven principals stressed the value of developing teacher leaders. At Charlie Middle school they partnered teachers up in a mentor/mentee type of relationship, they moved people around to provide more opportunities to serve in leadership roles (e.g., school improvement, curriculum and assessment), and they recognized each teacher’s expertise on a spreadsheet (e.g., report cards, technology). Delta Middle School was similar in using teachers to give presentations and lead professional development, rather than just the principal in that role all the time.

The principals at Alpha, Golf, and Hotel middle schools highlighted the importance of being visible and accessible to staff. The Golf Middle School principal said, “I value people by listening to them . . . they have to know it’s sincere, and so part of that too is knowing what their work is, being in their classrooms, and knowing who they are. . . .” She went on to say, “What doesn’t work for climate, a lot of it is when you get consumed with getting the tasks done and you don’t make time for people . . . I have to make time for people . . . .” Principal Hotel echoed that saying,

I think it really does make a difference if you’re out more . . . you’re in classrooms more, you’re visiting with teachers more, they see and know and understand that . . . you’re coming in to visit . . . that says I want you to know I’m here, I’m supportive of what you’re doing.

Another common strategy was that of developing consensus and giving staff a “voice” in the workings of the school. Principal Alpha said,
I think an effective way . . . is just trying to define what those things are . . . being able to say, what do we really believe about the classroom, what are the things you expect to see . . . what do we not want to see . . . so I think defining some of those things but allowing staff to have a voice in that . . .

The Golf Middle School principal talked about defining what your values are as an organization and then attending to those values. She went on to say,

when you don’t give people input into the process and you just give them information, if you don’t give them the opportunity to be part of solving the problems, if you isolate people, if you don’t give them the opportunity to talk, that’s bad for climate, you don’t listen, that whole devaluing process.

At Hotel Middle School the principal found that pacing, when it comes to change, is critical particularly when people aren’t ready. (The India Middle School principal said this as well). He shared, “I feel like I’ve pushed too quick, especially in an environment where some people are hesitant, and in our building, have strong voices, and those strong voices influence a lot of people and climate.”

Having a strong focus on instruction was powerful for the climates at Bravo, Charlie, and Juliette middle schools. The Bravo principal said, “focusing on instruction (and not student behavior) and developing student ownership in the classroom for their learning . . .” were the two biggest things they did that positively impacted their school climate. The principal at Charlie Middle School said he consistently looked at strong content instructional pieces and how that impacted climate as well. Principal Juliette stated, “Interdisciplinary teaming . . . when those teachers are making decisions for what’s best for their kids, what you find is that the relationships between the instructors are more cohesive. . . .”
Reflections on School Climate

Lastly, principals were asked to reflect on anything they would change or anything else they would like to share. The Echo Middle School principal wants to find ways to get the kids more involved in the everyday workings of the school. She said, helping them to feel like this is a place that is theirs . . . you’ve gotta listen to kids, you’ve gotta find out what they need and what they want . . . have conversations with kids and have them provide some decisions in that process.

Principal Foxtrot reiterated the idea that climate is something principals deliberately have to focus on saying, “it’s gotta happen purposefully . . . I don’t think it’s something that just happens. . . .” At Golf Middle school the principal shared that keeping a pulse on your school is really important and that you have to have other people around you that you can trust who will give you good information about the climate because you will have “blind spots.” The principal at Hotel Middle School is looking to strengthen his school’s connection to the community knowing that will positively impact the climate in his building. He is working to establish ways to get parents involved, partner with the community learning center, and partner with the other schools in the area (the feeder elementary buildings and the main high school Hotel feeds to) so the school can serve and support the community more.

Themes

Overall, six strong themes or strategies emerged with at least nine of the principals talking about each of these – relationships, hiring and staffing (to include addressing teaching performance), principal visibility and accessibility, recognition (mainly of staff, but also of students), principal transparency and communication, and
that idea of developing shared ownership and empowering teachers and giving them a “voice.” Relationships was the only theme or strategy that was mentioned consistently by all 10 principals. Over and over again principals talked about building and having strong positive relationships with and among their staff and also with students. For a climate to be positive, it is paramount that people have mutual respect and that they treat each other well professionally and personally. Principals want people to feel valued, supported, and have the confidence to perform at the highest levels they can.

Relationships are critical to developing a collaborative community within the school. Trust was also explicitly mentioned by four principals as it contributed to relationships.

Hiring and staffing, as it relates to school climate, was discussed by nine of the principals. Many said the same thing about working to hire the “right” or “best” people and shared that recruiting and retaining qualified candidates is often a challenge. The Juliette principal summed it up by saying,

> spend the time wisely, put in all the extra hours up front, because it will certainly pay huge dividends for you in the long run . . . get rid of those that are not going to help your district out, and continue to hire the best people you can, makes all the difference in a school climate.

Principal India simply stated, “Teachers matter.”

Nine principals also talked about the importance of them being visible and accessible to their staff and the role that plays in supporting and developing a positive school climate. This theme or strategy is also linked to the relationships principals work to develop in their buildings. Principals felt it was important for staff to see them in the classrooms and wanted staff to know that they were there to have conversations and partner with them. In fact, to ensure this happens in his building, the India Middle
School principal goes into every classroom and teaches a lesson each year. Being available to people was also an important component. Principals talked about being a listener, being approachable, being present and open, and not trying to “fix” everything. The principal at Hotel Middle School cautioned, “you want to be involved and engaged but you don’t want to micromanage.”

Principals in nine schools also mentioned the role recognition plays in promoting a positive school climate. While most principals talked about ways of recognizing teachers, some principals talked about the ways they try and recognize students as well. In terms of student recognition, school-wide systems for reinforcing academic achievement and positive behavior were mentioned as they fit into a PBIS framework. Examples were front of the line for lunch, student of month/week, “principal perks” for random acts of kindness (i.e., catching kids being good), honor roll, school pride awards, etc. Teacher recognition included personal notes or quick conversations after classroom visits, formal recognition at a staff meeting (highlights, celebrations, and thank you’s), supporting the good ideas people have that positively impact climate, capitalizing on teacher strengths and expertise, and sharing achievement data in a public way (e.g., billboard in cafeteria).

Nine principals discussed being transparent and communicating with staff. They stressed the importance of having clear communication with staff, ensuring staff know the direction of the school, and being transparent with their values and beliefs and how that relates to the values of the building. Part of this requires an awareness on the principal’s part of what is going on in the school and then using being visible and
accessible as a way to build trust and credibility. The Alpha Middle School principal shared that being transparent with your staff is a way to let them know that you are committed to the school and are an advocate for teachers. At Bravo Middle School the principal is deliberate in sharing achievement data with staff so that everyone is on the same page. Principal Charlie stated, “I think the biggest thing in climate is that trust factor with all of your constituents, you have to develop that . . . they know everything you’re doing is best for kids and the people of the building. . . .” The Delta principal was specific, saying, “But there are things that I want to see take place but I want to encourage them to do what they are to do without being heavy-handed . . . but there are things I will not compromise on.” A few principals eluded to sometimes needing to have tough conversations with staff as it relates to this theme to include setting expectations and holding people accountable. Principal Echo said,

recognizing that my goals are not necessarily everybody else’s goals, and so therefore trying to weigh in on, ok but the goal needs to be what’s best for kids . . . so articulating that but also helping people to come along in that realm. . . .

One principal said, “and the longer you wait, the less credibility you have.” Similarly, the Golf Middle School principal stated,

I can have a lot of impact on climate in then not just in how I set the tone for the building but then how I will, when and how I intervene when I see climate being negative or threatened. . . .

Developing shared ownership, giving teachers a “voice,” and empowering teachers was mentioned by nine principals as having a positive impact on school climate. Principals talked about getting teacher “buy-in,” setting goals together, and sharing a focus on the vision for the school. The Bravo principal talked about getting teachers to
see the “bigger picture” as one way to have them help drive the direction of the school. Two principals shared that they had used book studies with their staff as a way to establish some common ground and shared purpose. The Delta Middle School staff read “This We Believe” from the Association for Middle Level Education, and the Golf Middle School staff read *The Culture Code* by Daniel Coyle. The Golf principal stated, “you have to define what your values are as an organization . . . and we attend to those values. . . .” The principal at Echo Middle School shared the experience of changing the building schedule. She had about a dozen teachers volunteer to be on the committee and said it was helpful for them to be part of the process so they could better understand all of the schedule options and the dynamics that go into selecting one schedule over another. She stated, “And so now it’s good to hear teachers telling other teachers, well yes but this is why that doesn’t work,” and “you’ve got to involve the people that are going to be impacted, they have to be involved in that process, you can’t do it to them, you have to help do it with them.” “You want people to have a say in the things that they’re doing in the classroom” said the Hotel principal. The India principal shared, “And it wasn’t because of me, I recognized it, it was because I just empowered good teachers to do what they needed to do and that’s teach your kids.”

**Walkthroughs**

As mentioned in the methodology section, only two walkthroughs were able to be completed as the interviews primarily took place during the summer months when school was not in session. Parts of the semi-structured observational protocol were still able to be completed based on the respondents’ answers. Of the 15 statements on the protocol,
the following three statements were supported by all 10 principals’ interview responses:

“The principal involves everyone in the decision-making process,” “Teachers in this school show respect for students,” and “The principal treats people as though they are responsible.” Eight principals’ responses support the statement, “student discipline is approached from a positive standpoint.” As intended, this checklist helped to triangulate the respondents’ answers and gain further evidence of the leadership strategies being utilized to create positive school climates.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

This study focused on understanding the leadership strategies that middle school principals have found successful for developing a positive school climate in order to influence the teaching and learning interactions that take place in their school. The climate of a school is important, and building leaders are in a position to influence school climate. As an educator for over 20 years now, I have always been interested in the climate aspect of schooling as it pertains to both staff and students, although this study focused primarily on principal leadership. I have experienced both positive and negative school climates in my line of work which has further developed my interest in creating safe and supportive school climates focused on classroom management, engaged learning, positive behavior, and staff morale.

Overview of Study

This qualitative study was designed to help us better understand the leadership strategies middle school principals use to positively influence school climate in the short term, which ultimately creates a positive school culture for the long term. It is important to know what strategies are effective in shaping and promoting school climate so that school leaders can learn and develop these strategies for the benefit of the teaching and learning relationships in their schools. Ten middle school principals in the state of Nebraska participated in the study. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews that were audiotaped and transcribed for data analysis. The nine interview questions
addressed the research sub questions of: What role do principals believe leadership plays in promoting and shaping school climate?; What strategies have principals used to develop a positive school climate?; What strategies have principals used to improve a negative school climate?; and What strategies have principals used to maintain a positive school climate? When available, a walkthrough of the building with the principal was conducted to triangulate the respondents’ answers and gain further evidence of the leadership strategies being utilized. During the walkthroughs, I completed a semi-structured observational checklist. Parts of the checklist were still able to be completed based on the respondents’ answers if a walkthrough did not occur. When available, physical artifacts were also examined, and photographs of the artifacts were taken to aid in later data analysis.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that only 10 middle school principals in Nebraska were interviewed of the 135 middle school principals listed on the Nebraska Department of Education website. While this may have some generalizability locally and perhaps regionally, generalizability to other parts of the nation with different demographics may be limited, although the results from this study indicate there are more similarities than there are differences, regardless of setting. Principal participation was also limited by years of experience within one building (the study required at least 3 years in one building) as well as the grade configuration within the building (grades 6-8).

The middle schools that participated in this study were situated in communities that have their own “identity,” if you will. Consolidated school districts are a reality in
many parts of Nebraska and the impact consolidation has on the climate of a school building and community is not represented here. Additionally, while the two female principals who participated in this study represent 20% of my study sample, which is representative of the eligible sample population (out of the 67 middle school principals in Nebraska that were eligible to participate, 12 are female, which is 18%), in my opinion, the female “voice” is still limited in this study to two participants.

Often qualitative research involves extended interactions with the participants. This study consisted of only one interview with each principal, and only two walkthroughs were able to be conducted. Data from the walkthroughs were mainly based on interview answers, as the majority of the interviews (9 out of 10) were conducted during the summer when school was not in session, and the remaining interview was conducted over the phone, so interactions between people (administration, staff, students, etc.) in the buildings were unable to be observed. Observations of the interactions between people in the school building would give valuable insight into the climate of the school.

One additional note, during the course of the Delta Middle School interview, it was discovered that he is the principal for a building with a grade 4-8 configuration, but the students in grades 4-5 are in self-contained classrooms with separate lunch periods and a separate bell schedule. The interview focused on his work with the 6-8 grade teachers and students.
Discussion

Overall, six strong themes or strategies emerged with at least nine of the ten principals talking about each of these – relationships, hiring and staffing (to include addressing teaching performance), principal visibility and accessibility, recognition (mainly of staff, but also of students), principal transparency and communication, and that idea of developing shared ownership and empowering teachers and giving them a “voice.” All 10 principals interviewed talked about building and having strong positive relationships with and among their staff. This affirms what the literature says and what I know to be true from experience: relationships are essential to developing a collaborative community within the school.

Nine (9) of the 10 principals agreed that hiring and staffing are also critical components of developing a positive school climate. Again, “teachers matter.” Invest the time and energy it takes to recruit and retain the most qualified or “best” candidates and be willing to do the hard work when needed to address an ineffective teacher. Visibility in the building and accessibility to staff was discussed by 9 of the 10 principals as well. They emphasized the importance of staff seeing them in the classrooms and being there to listen and have conversations with them. They advised a balanced approach of being engaged and involved, without trying to fix or manage everything. Principals in nine out of the 10 schools mentioned the role recognition plays in promoting a positive school climate. School-wide systems for reinforcing academic achievement and positive behavior were mentioned as they fit into a PBIS framework. Teacher
recognition included formal and informal recognition, supporting the good ideas people have that positively impact climate, and capitalizing on teacher strengths and expertise.

Being transparent and communicating with staff was mentioned by nine of the principals. Clearly communicating the direction of the school and with staff, and being transparent with their values and beliefs and how that relates to the values of the building is important. Situational awareness, visibility, and accessibility are all ways principals can build trust and credibility. Part of this theme requires principals to set expectations and hold people accountable. Nine of 10 principals believe developing shared ownership and giving teachers a “voice” have a positive impact on school climate. Principals talked about setting goals together, using book studies, and defining the values of the organization together as ways to establish some common ground and shared purpose.

All 10 principals’ interview responses supported the following three statements on the walkthrough protocol: “The principal involves everyone in the decision-making process,” “Teachers in this school show respect for students,” and “The principal treats people as though they are responsible.” Eight (8) principals’ responses supported the statement, “student discipline is approached from a positive standpoint.”

These themes are found throughout the literature on school climate and affirm that, at least within the confines of this study, middle school principals are in agreement as to what is effective in developing and maintaining positive school climates. These same strategies are helpful in preventing or addressing a negative school climate. These themes also directly relate to the central research question (What leadership strategies
have middle school principals found successful for developing a positive school climate?)

and the corresponding sub questions.

**Suggestions for future research**

This study focused on understanding and describing the strategies that middle school principals implement to influence the climate of a building to make it a more effective learning environment. A future study should address what teachers perceive to be effective principal leadership practices (strategies) for shaping and promoting a positive and healthy school climate. Teachers should also be asked to describe their experiences with teaching in schools with both positive and negative school climates. Additionally, a future study should address what students perceive to be effective principal leadership practices (strategies) on shaping and promoting a positive and healthy school climate. Students should also be asked to describe their experiences with learning in schools with both positive and negative school climates.

Many other external influences exist that can have an impact on school climate. Future studies could include examining the climates of schools experiencing changing community demographics (e.g., consolidation, resettlement of refugees, loss of business and industry), the climates of schools with designations of high SES vs. low SES populations, and the climates of schools with English Language Learner populations vs. schools without. School district factors such as the teacher appraisal system, implementation of new curriculum, testing mandates, and budget cuts should also be studied for their impact on school climate.
Additionally, future research on school climate could take the form of a “pure” ethnography as well – the climate and culture of one school (either high performing or low performing or even a comparison of both) could be studied in depth, and the relationships within the teaching and learning community explored more deeply (i.e., principal-teacher, teacher-teacher, teacher-student). As this study focused only on middle schools, future research will need to address elementary schools and high schools as well to include principal leadership strategies, teacher perceptions, and student perceptions.

Future studies should also examine the factors that influence school climate in the short-term and how those compare to the factors that influence school culture in the long-term.

Implications

Case studies should always provide us with lessons learned. Hopefully, the findings from this research study will help to narrow the gap between what we know about shaping and promoting positive and healthy school climates and relating specific strategies to changes in school climate. Further, this study provides middle school principals with practices they can implement, and resources they can access, to influence the climate of their building to make it a more effective learning environment. Here we’ve affirmed that relationships, hiring and staffing, principal visibility and accessibility, recognition, principal transparency and communication, and developing shared ownership and empowering teachers have influence and impact on developing a positive school climate while simultaneously improving a negative one if it exists.
These findings affirm that when it comes to creating an effective teaching and learning environment principals will need to ask themselves: What is the climate of the school – the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, learning, and leadership practices, and organizational structures?; What can I do to strengthen aspects of the climate to make it better?; and What can I do when we need to reshape the climate and move in a different direction? At times principals may find themselves in the uncomfortable, but necessary, position of confronting negativity head-on while putting structures in place to start correcting the problems. To this end, one message was clear from the principals in this study and confirmed what I believe to be true: principals must focus deliberately on school climate; it cannot be left to chance.
References


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International Alliance for Invitational Education. (2016). *Welcome to IAIE.*
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Appendix A

Interview Protocol
Interview protocol

The problem of practice this study attempts to address is how administrators change negative school climates, and develop and maintain positive school climates in order to influence the teaching and learning interactions that take place in their school.

Central Question: What leadership strategies have middle school principals found successful for developing a positive school climate?

Sub Questions:
What role do principals believe leadership plays in promoting and shaping school climate?
What strategies have principals used to develop a positive school climate?
What strategies have principals used to improve a negative school climate?
What strategies have principals used to maintain a positive school climate?

1. How do you define school climate?
2. What was the climate of this building like when you got here? (going well/challenges)
3. What level of importance do you believe leadership has in promoting and shaping school climate?
4. What are your goals in promoting and shaping a positive school climate? (your goals as a leader, your goals for the building, your goals for your administrative team, and your goals for your teacher leaders)
5. What strategies have you implemented to develop/maintain a positive school climate?
6. What strategies have you implemented to improve a negative school climate?

7. What have you found to be powerful/effective in transforming school climate? 
   What has not been effective?

8. Is there anything you would change?

9. Anything else you would like to share?
Appendix B

IRB Form
IRB Number # 18216

Study Title:

Building a Positive School Climate: What Principals Have Done to Effect Change (an ethnographic case study)

Invitation

Dear [Middle School Principal],

My name is Sue Showers. I am conducting a study on understanding how middle school administrators transform schools with negative climates, and develop and maintain positive climates in order to influence the teaching and learning interactions that take place in their school. If you are 19 years of age or older, are a principal in a middle school with a grade configuration of 6-8, and have had at least 3 consecutive years of experience as principal in one middle school building (it need not be the building you are currently in), you may participate in this research.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

A review of the relevant literature consistently points to a gap in research focused on relating specific interventions to changes in school climate. The climate of a school is important, and building leaders are in a position to influence school climate. This study is designed to help us better understand the leadership strategies middle school principals use to positively influence school climate in the short term, which ultimately creates a positive school culture for the long term.

What will be done during this research study?

Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. You will participate in an interview (approximately 25-30 minutes in length) that will be audiotaped. If possible we will complete a walk-through of the building where I will act in the role of complete observer, and would take notes and complete a checklist (approximately 5-30 minutes in length). Photographs of physical artifacts may be taken to aid in later data analysis. Participation will take place at your building, or via Zoom (web-based video conference) if an on-site visit is not possible.
What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

What are the possible benefits to you?

There are no direct benefits to you as a participant, however this study is designed to help us better understand the leadership strategies middle school principals use to positively influence school climate in the short term, which ultimately creates a positive school culture for the long term.

How will information about you be protected?

Your responses to this survey will be kept confidential. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Audio files and transcripts will be kept in a file on my phone or computer (both devices are password protected). Only I have access to these 2 devices. Files will be deleted 6 months following conferment of degree.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s):
Sue Showers, doctoral student, sue.showers72@gmail.com (402) 416-2604
Dr. Kent Mann, advisor, kmann2@unl.edu (402) 472-3459

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(402)472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu
What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By signing this page at the time of the scheduled interview, you have given your consent to participate in this research. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date
Appendix C

Walkthrough Protocol
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Not Observed</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student discipline is approached from a positive standpoint.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The principal involves everyone in the decision-making process.</td>
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<td>3. Teachers are willing to help students who have special problems.</td>
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<td>4. Teachers in this school show respect for students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Teachers exhibit a sense of humor.</td>
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<td>6. The Principal's office is accessible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. People in this school are polite to one another.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Everyone arrives on time for school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Daily attendance by students and staff is high.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. The messages and notes sent home are positive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. The Principal treats people as though they are responsible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. People often feel welcome when they enter the school.</td>
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<td>13. Interruptions to classroom academic activities are kept to a minimum.</td>
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<td>14. Teachers appear to enjoy life.</td>
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<td>15. School pride is evident among students.</td>
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</table>

Adapted from: Inviting School Survey – Revised (ISS-R), IAIE (International Alliance for Invitational Education, 2016)
Appendix D

Artifacts
**Alpha Middle School climate study goals and action plan**

### Current Results:
- 54.1%
- 22.9%
- 4.0%
- 13.7%
- 0.3%
- 0.0%

### Expected Goal:
- 80%

#### Top Item Focus
- I am fully engaged in the work I do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Taken?</th>
<th>Action Planning Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We value the importance of being our best selves for our students on a daily basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We want to work in a building where every staff member is engaged and valued.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We would like to invest more time and effort into doing the things we enjoy most.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Current Score:** 4.64 – **Goal Score:** 5.00

#### Bottom Item Focus #1
- I have received meaningful recognition in the past 10 days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Taken?</th>
<th>Action Planning Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We want to find tangible ways that we can receive recognition and thanks for the work we do, big and small.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We will work on developing a recognition preference sheet that outlines meaningful recognition for each team member.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We want to see everyone and all levels involved in recognition improvements.</td>
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<td>We will utilize our learning walks as not only an opportunity to gain new ideas, but to also notice the great things others are doing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We would be interested in receiving targeted feedback and recognition from the times others are spending observing our room.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We would like to get to know our substitute teachers better and will work on posting their pictures and info to the staff lounge.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We will seek new ways to show outward recognition, such as “Post-It Note” doors and meaningful notes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Current Score:** 3.67 – **Goal Score:** 4.20

#### Bottom Item Focus #2
- School District selects the right people for the right job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Taken?</th>
<th>Action Planning Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We would be interested in receiving advanced notice, if appropriate, when there will be changes within our own roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We desire the opportunity to know the why and where of staffing changes within our role, team, and building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We would enjoy the chance to meet potential team members prior to their joining of a team and use it as an opportunity to offer input on their “fit factor” for the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We want to give tours and insight to potential team members as they are moving through the selection process, so they can also get a feel for us and our culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We enjoy when we are allowed offer input and feedback on selection decisions within our building – this brings us a sense of pride and worth when our voices are heard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Current Score:** 3.54 – **Goal Score:** 3.99
Bravo Middle School action board
Guidelines for Professional Interactions

Positive Attitude
- Project positive body language and eye contact
- Be mentally prepared for positive interactions
- Be open minded and be willing to accept feedback
- Accept differences in viewpoint and personality
- Be prepared to discuss alternative solutions
- Approach issues professionally rather than personally

Effective Communication
- Keep communication positive (above the line) in nature
- Focus on solution based discussions
- Paraphrase for clarity
- Keep tone respectful
- Face to face communication whenever possible
- Keep emails professional and to the point (not a place for conflict resolution)

Build Positive Professional Relationships
- Respect your teammates and colleagues both professionally and personally
- Model with colleagues what we expect from students
- Understand each staff member’s role is vital for students
- Recognize each other’s successes and learn from each other’s challenges/experiences

Professional Accountability
- Follow agenda
- Accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses
- Stay on topic – Personal responsibilities should not be dealt with during meetings (grading papers, checking email, personal phone calls, personal conversations)
- Be on time – Stay for entire meeting
- Be aware of confidentiality issues
- Turn off your cell phone
- Practice effective and responsible computer usage

Revised June 29, 2017

Charlie Middle School guidelines for professional interactions
Learning Principles

We believe all students can learn when a safe environment and an adult advocate are in place. Therefore, teachers will collaborate to teach critical skills, expectations, and routines to ensure the safety and well-being of all students.

We believe students must have clear, measurable goals in order to improve learning. Therefore, teachers will engage students by using instructional strategies while providing feedback.

We believe students have a range of readiness and motivation levels. Therefore, teachers will assess and provide differentiated instruction so that each student can be successful.

We believe a student’s knowledge, experiences, and learning preferences affect achievement. Therefore, teachers will build background knowledge, expose students to different modalities of learning, and improve student awareness of personal learning styles.

We believe successful learning requires reflection, self-assessment, and use of feedback to self-adjust. Therefore, teachers will help improve each student’s ability to reflect on specific knowledge gaps and create a pathway to growth.

We believe communication with stakeholders is vital to student success. Therefore, staff will collaborate with students, parents, community members, and colleagues to ensure growth.

Revised June 29, 2017

Charlie Middle School learning principles
### Delta Middle School model of instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should see and hear daily</th>
<th>Should see and hear but not daily</th>
<th>Should not see or hear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Learning goals and instructional objectives displayed</td>
<td>- Movement</td>
<td>- Sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Integration of technology</td>
<td>- Academic games</td>
<td>- Criticism of mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Formative assessments of student progress</td>
<td>- Previewing, reviewing, reflecting, and reteaching content</td>
<td>- Busy Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reinforcement of rules and procedures</td>
<td>- Homework used as formative assessment</td>
<td>- Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Higher level questioning</td>
<td>- Evidence of teaching beyond curriculum</td>
<td>- Disengagement of teacher and student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teacher enthusiasm and celebrations of success</td>
<td>- Evidence of productive struggle</td>
<td>- Tatting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student engagement</td>
<td>- Evidence of inquiry and prior knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Establishment and continuation of positive student/teacher and student/student relationships</td>
<td>- Student-teacher conferencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Student demonstrations of grit and growth mindset (I don’t know... yet!)</td>
<td>- Sharing of student successes with the school family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High expectations for every student</td>
<td>- Assessment of student progress using summative assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reflections on learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Examples of rich and meaningful content</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

"Educators knowledgeable about and committed to young adolescents."
Delta Middle School team learning goals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFLUENCE - Impact on Student Learning (POSITIVE IMPACT)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher credibility in eyes of the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing formative evaluation to teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reciprocal teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meta-cognitive strategy programs</td>
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<td>Acceleration (for example, skipping a year)</td>
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<td>Vocabulary programs</td>
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<td>Comprehension programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperative vs. individualistic learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing worked examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development on student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using simulations and gaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualizing instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within – class grouping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching teaching with student learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability grouping/tracking/streaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male compared with female achievement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher subject matter knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole language programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student control over learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retention (holding back a year)</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PE</th>
<th>RANK</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student expectations</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher credibility in eyes of the students</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing formative evaluation to teachers</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional development on student achievement</td>
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<td>Teacher expectation</td>
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**Delta Middle School instructional strategies**