

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP TEAMS AND IMPACTS ON CAMPUS  
CULTURE AS MEASURED BY COLLABORATION, DECISION MAKING,  
CONFLICT, COMMUNICATION, FAVORITISM, AND CONFIDENCE

A Record of Study

By

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of micropolitics between members of school administrative leadership teams and the effect that these interactions and relationships have on the culture, climate, and academic achievement of students in a middle school is an area of organizational research that has not been thoroughly studied. To meet the increasingly complex duties and responsibilities facing school leadership today, schools have shifted the leadership model from that of a single authoritative leader making all decisions on the campus to a more collaborative, shared leadership model where a team of administrators share leadership responsibilities and make decisions in a collaborative manner.

A descriptive analysis of student and teacher demographic data, a comparative analysis of school improvement plans, and a review of disciplinary data was performed for each school. A three-year longitudinal analysis of STAAR results was made to determine the level of student achievement realized on each campus with results scaled to state averages for each year to control for the variation in scores from year to year.

Using an open-ended semi-structures interview protocol, an investigation of the perceived quality of micropolitical conversations occurring within the administrative leadership teams of three middle schools was performed to ascertain the quality of the interactions, the proficiency of communication, how conflicts were resolved, and the ability of the team to build trust by maintaining confidentiality of sensitive information. Department coordinators were interviewed to learn their perceptions of the level of confidence that they had in the administrative leadership team, the level of support they received from the administration, and administrative expectations for instruction, grading, and performance on STAAR.

A review of generic school improvement plans was conducted to learn the issues that each campus had identified as areas for growth and improvement. Demographic data, and STAAR results were aligned with interview findings to determine if positive micropolitical relationships between the members of the campus the administrative leadership team had a positive impact on the culture and climate of the school, with a positive impact on student achievement.

Findings revealed that while positive micropolitical conversations occurring between the members of the administrative leadership team produced positive effects on the climate of the school, the leadership style of the principal had the greatest impact on micropolitics, school culture, climate, and student achievement. Three leadership styles were identified in this study: traditional managerial, collaborative, and empowerment.

The campus organizational structure preferred by the traditional managerial principal was a well-defined hierarchy, allowing for clearly communicated expectations of teachers and students that resulted in a high degree of academic success. The principal at the collaborative campus focused primarily on process, nurturing a positive campus climate, and encouraging all teachers to offer feedback in decision making process. Process took priority at the expense of the communication of clear campus culture, limiting student achievement. On the empowered campus, the culture, and climate were dependent personal trusting relationships with the principal, often resulting in an inconsistency of policy. Regardless of these inconsistencies, the campus experienced positive student achievement.

## DEDICATION

Without the continued support of my beautiful wife Carol over these long, arduous months, this study would never have come to fruition. I would also like to thank my children Erin, Benjamin, and Robert who continue to inspire me by their successes in life, and their never ending sense of humor and support. Without the honest and sincere conversations that I had with the participants in my study, the most professional educators and administrators that I know, this study would not have been possible. Finally, I would like to thank everyone who helped me in this most difficult task, from my colleagues at school to the amazing faculty, staff, and students at Texas A&M University.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT .....                              | ii   |
| DEDICATION .....                            | iv   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....                      | v    |
| CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES .....      | vi   |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....                     | vii  |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....                       | ix   |
| LIST OF TABLES .....                        | x    |
| CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION .....                | 1    |
| Problem Statement .....                     | 2    |
| Purpose of the Study .....                  | 4    |
| Significance of the Study .....             | 5    |
| Theoretical Framework .....                 | 6    |
| Methods .....                               | 8    |
| CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....           | 9    |
| Introduction .....                          | 9    |
| Brief Review of Politics .....              | 9    |
| Fundamental Concepts of Micropolitics ..... | 11   |
| Leadership .....                            | 13   |
| Role in the Organization .....              | 20   |
| Trust .....                                 | 21   |
| Group Interaction .....                     | 22   |
| Team Dynamics .....                         | 26   |
| Attitude .....                              | 27   |
| Communication .....                         | 28   |
| Power .....                                 | 29   |
| Favoritism .....                            | 31   |
| Climate and Culture .....                   | 34   |
| CHAPTER III METHODS .....                   | 38   |
| Introduction .....                          | 38   |
| Methods .....                               | 38   |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Data Sources .....   | 40  |
| Sampled Schools .....  | 40  |
| Participants .....   | 43  |
| Data Collection .....  | 44  |
| Interview Questions .....                                      | 45  |
| Field Notes .....  | 46  |
| Data Analysis .....  | 47  |
| School A .....   | 49  |
| School B .....   | 49  |
| School C .....   | 49  |
| Impact of STAAR Data .....                                     | 50  |
| Data Management .....  | 50  |
| Reliability and Trustworthiness .....                          | 51  |
| Role of the Researcher .....                                   | 52  |
| Summary .....  | 52  |
| <br>   |     |
| CHAPTER IV FINDINGS .....                                      | 53  |
| Introduction .....   | 53  |
| Summary of Methods.....  | 53  |
| Results .....  | 56  |
| Summary .....  | 85  |
| <br>   |     |
| CHAPTER V SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION .....            | 86  |
| <br>   |     |
| Introduction .....   | 86  |
| Summary .....  | 86  |
| Purpose of Study .....   | 87  |
| Theoretical Framework .....                                    | 87  |
| Discussion .....   | 88  |
| Leadership Style and Organizational Structure .....            | 88  |
| Micropolitics in the Context of Organizational Structure ..... | 93  |
| Communication .....  | 95  |
| Negotiation and Resolution of Conflict .....                   | 97  |
| Culture and Climate .....                                      | 98  |
| Outcomes of Campus Micropolitics .....                         | 101 |
| Limitations .....  | 106 |
| Conclusion .....   | 107 |
| Implications for Practice .....                                | 109 |
| Suggestions for Further Study .....                            | 111 |
| <br>   |     |
| REFERENCES .....   | 112 |



## LIST OF FIGURES

| FIGURE |  | Page |
|--------|--|------|
| 1      | Organizational Structure at School A ..... | 90   |
| 2      | Organizational Structure at School B ..... | 91   |
| 3      | Organizational Structure at School C ..... | 92   |

LIST OF TABLES

| TABLE |  | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 1     | School A Demographics .....                        | 41   |
| 2     | School B Demographics .....                        | 42   |
| 3     | School C Demographics .....                        | 43   |
| 4     | Interview Questions and Themes.....                | 55   |
| 5     | School A Three-Year Cohort STAAR Performance ..... | 103  |
| 6     | School B Three-Year Cohort STAAR Performance ..... | 104  |
| 7     | School C Three-Year Cohort STAAR Performance ..... | 105  |

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The structure of public school campus level leadership has changed over the past thirty years. What was once a simple hierarchy with the principal recognized as the sole decision maker and final authority has now become a more complex collaborative leadership model that relies on input from several individuals who engage in a dialogue designed to assist the principal in the decision making process.

When the collaborative leadership model replaced the traditional organizational structure of the principal as the authority, the dynamics and relationships between administration and teachers become more complex. The addition of multiple sources of authority found in an administrative leadership team brings to the table increased possibilities that information shared with teachers may be inconsistent, or contradictory, depending on the interpretation of the administrator relaying the message. This inconsistency in interpretation by members of the administrative leadership team may encourage teachers to “shop” for an administrator offering a more desirable response, thus impacting the fidelity of the culture and climate of the school. There is also the possibility that philosophical differences between members of the collaborative team can create misunderstandings or misinterpretations of messages that could lead to ineffective leadership practices.

This study examines the effects of personal, professional, and political relationships and exchanges between members of the school’s administrative leadership team and how these exchanges affect associations with the core academic teachers. Prior studies that investigated the effects of micropolitics on organizational outcomes (Burns, 1961, Bacharach, Bamberger, &

Sonnenstuhl, 1996) suggest that as political, personal, and micropolitical exchanges between members of the administrative leadership team improve, student achievement, culture and climate will improve (Ehrich & Cranston, (2004). Conversely, when there are patterns of unresolved conflict, infighting within the team, and an absence of purpose, academics, culture and climate will suffer.

This is not to imply that conflict, disagreement, or breakdown of relationships between members of administrative leadership teams will lead to catastrophic results for teachers or students. The way conflict is managed is an important factor in how internal disagreements affect school culture and climate (Ehrich & Cranston, 2004). Teams that embrace diversity, seek compromise, and maintain a professional demeanor when communicating with teachers and students should be better equipped to resolve problems, minimize negative impacts on teachers and students, and work to restructure and re-culture the school (Fullan, 1997, 2007). When individual members of the team communicate fragmented or mixed messages that are contrary, culture and climate suffers (Pillsbury, 2014, Phillips & Phillips, 2007). A shared, united front cannot be underestimated.

### **Problem Statement**

Today's public schools are faced with increased accountability requirements, reduced funding from the restructuring of local property taxes, and competition for students by private, charter, and on-line schools (Booke, Gilpatric, Gronberg, & Jansen, 2008, Johnson, Oliff., & Williams, 2011). One way that schools responded to challenges in the past was to establish campus-based decision making teams intended to improve responsiveness to the needs of the school and the community. With the introduction of high-stakes standardized testing and increased accountability, public schools were forced to seek new solutions to meet complex

needs. Collaborative instructional models, professional learning communities, and administrative leadership teams became popular organizational structures to address these new challenges since they are more responsive to the increasingly complex problems that schools face (Chrispeels, & Martin, 2002).

Prior to the educational reforms of the early 2000's, the responsibility of campus decision making rested solely with the principal (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002). The principal was free to make unilateral decisions without input or advice from other school professionals, and worked in a top-down, directive-driven organizational structure (Christensen, 1993). When the introduction of high stakes-testing, the role of the principal changed. No longer could one person effectively manage the complex needs of the school. To meet these new challenges, districts began to adopt a collaborative leadership model introducing shared roles and responsibilities by principals and junior administrators (Cooley, & Shen, 2003). Problem solving, data sharing and analysis, joint decision making, and distributed leadership models gave school administrators the tools to encourage teachers to learn from one another, trust and respect one another, and foster a sense of professionalism and instructional practices to positively impact student achievement (Dufour, 2009). Ideally, members of leadership teams discuss many critical issues and offer advice to the principal prior to the final decision making process by making recommendations for school improvement (Christensen, 1993). Teamwork is important because the practical and idealistic approach to school governance provides a formal structure of duties in a cooperative and collaborative environment (Cardino, 2012).

Drawing examples from the business and management literature, we find that this might not always be the case. Even the most collaborative and professional teams experience stress and conflict that could threaten to destroy the cohesiveness of the team (De Dreu, & Weingart, 2003,

Shaw, Zhu, Duffy, Scott, Shih, & Susanto, 2011). Organizational structures can range from top-down micro-management to full collaboration. Some teams are fractured and openly hostile, continually embroiled in conflict (Somech, 2008). This occurs when some members attempt to exert more influence than others because they believe that they have a more positive relationship with the principal (Burriss, Rodgers, Mannix, Hendron, & Oldroyd, 2009). As dysfunction and hostility increase, teachers, parents, and students receive mixed-messages that lead to confusion, encouraging teachers to seek “friendly” administrators who give them answers that they seek. As individuals or groups of teachers align with an administrator that they believe is sympathetic, division is created that can lead to the deterioration of the authority and threaten the integrity of the administrative team (Stiles, Gratton, Truss, Hope-Hailey, & McGovern, 1997).

This shifting role of the principal from sole authority to collaborative equal in an administrative leadership team can be another source of tension. The principal holds the dual role of formal authority and team leader (Ehrich, & Cranston, 2004), and member of the collaborative leadership team. If the team is inefficient, or experiences internal conflict and disagreement that polarizes or fragments the staff, the principal is held accountable for negative consequences that result from the failure of the leadership team to function. The administrative leadership team must work together to make decisions, implement their decisions with fidelity, and meet the needs of students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to understand how micropolitical exchanges between members of the administrative leadership team impact the ability of the team to resolve conflict, propose new ideas, contribute to the decision making process, and share sensitive and confidential information with teachers and the accompanying effect on the culture and climate of the school.

As an effective campus leader, the principal must understand their preferred leadership style and know how to manipulate interactions between members of the leadership team to meet the needs of students. In this study micropolitics as defined as the formal and informal power struggles within the administrative leadership team as they make decisions affecting the school. The way administrative leadership teams select information shared with teachers is influenced by individual perceptions and feelings. The way this information is shared, received, and interpreted by teachers is crucial to the establishment and maintenance of a healthy culture and climate.

A positive culture is dependent upon the ability of the administrative leadership team to communicate a common set of morals, beliefs, values and expectations while making decisions in the best interest of students. When teachers believe that opinions are valued, and can express their opinions in a safe, non-judgmental environment, school climate is enhanced.

### **Significance of the Study**

In Texas, the Commissioner's Rules addressing educator standards define the roles and responsibilities of school principals as the establishment of a campus environment conducive to student learning, the improvement of academic achievement, and communication of high expectations and vision of success for all students (19 TAC Chapter 149, Subchapter BB). Principals are expected to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of campus instructional strategies, seek feedback from teachers and students, and build positive relationships. To be effective, teachers and staff must engage in candid conversations about the progress and challenges that they face, and engage members of the school community in a dialogue where concerns and ideas are discussed in a safe environment. Principals are expected to provide teachers with supportive feedback to create a positive campus culture, and engage in meaningful dialogue with teachers, parents, and the community.

There is limited research that investigates the relationships between members of the administrative leadership team and the impact that these relationships have on school climate and culture (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016, Lee & Li, 2015, Roby, 2011). This is due in part, to recent changes in school governance resulting in the implementation of a collaborative leadership model. The importance of micropolitics in the decision making process, policy implementation, and communication of expectations and policy requirements to teachers and students. The study of micropolitics is important for us understand the complexities of day to day interactions in the context of the school, and how relationships help shape school culture and climate.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theory that can help contextualize how administrators address complex problems as they present themselves is the contingency theory of leadership. According to the contingency theory of leadership, organizational goals are affected by environmental factors not controlled by the administration. When external environments change, changes in approach are necessary to meet the needs of new situations, and are most effective when there is an appropriate “fit” of leadership matched with needs (Donaldson, 2001). Different types of organizational structures are more effective than others when making decisions based on environmental needs (Grandori, 1984).

The contingency theory of leadership assumes that there are two types of leaders: task driven leaders and relationship driven leaders. Depending upon the environment, the leadership style of the principal can have a significant influence on how the school performs. Fielder, who proposed contingency theory states:

The hypothesis merely states that the task-oriented leaders will perform more effectively under very favorable or unfavorable conditions, while relationship-oriented leaders will



perform more effectively under conditions intermediate in favorableness (Fiedler, 1967 p.169).

Decisions affecting public school performance and effectiveness are influenced by internal and external forces that interact with one other, creating an arena of struggle in which schools are in a constant state of conflict and tension (Ball, 1987, Blasé, 1991). Administrative leadership teams must not only manage internal conflict and tension as they address more complex problems, but in the broader context of campus and community politics. The conflict and tension experienced by members of the administrative leadership team as they interact with one another to reach consensus to effectively lead a school are areas of growth that can result in the improvement of the organization.

Conflict is a part of any organization. Members of the school community enter into the community with their own set of values, morals, goals and expectations, and these values, morals, goals and expectations may or may not be aligned with the formally adopted goals of the school and district, so it is important that campus administrative leadership teams identify aligned goals as well as those that are not. This differences in values, morals, goals, and expectations create a constant ebb and flow of compliance and resistance, keeping the school an ongoing organizational flux. These struggles can be studied through a micropolitical lens.

Micropolitics is defined as “the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations (Blasé, 1991 p.11). In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and to protect.” Hoyle (1982) further defines micropolitics as “strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational (sic) contexts seek to use their resources of authority and influence to further their interests” (p. 88). Power and influence play an important

role as micropolitics unfold in the context of administrative leadership teams as members interact, negotiate, and struggle with one another to make decisions that have a positive impact on the school while at the same time protecting their interests. Given the current demands and expectations on school leadership, principals and other campus leaders are expected to function as a cohesive unit to solve complex problems that impact student achievement.

### **Methods**

Designed as an exploratory case study, multiple sources of data will be analyzed, including interviews, demographic data, STAAR scores, and generic school improvement plans to learn if micropolitics in administrative leadership teams have an impact on the culture, climate, and student achievement of schools.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Prior to the work of Iannaccone (1975) who first suggested that there was a relationship of a mutual dependency between teachers, students, parents, administrators, and staff that was in a constant state of conflict, most studies in educational leadership focused on policy issues and their implementation (Lindle, 1994) or the role of the principal (Christensen, 1993, Crow, G. M., Hausman, C. S., & Scribner, 2002). The idea that political interactions at the micro level had an influence on the performance of the school was further studied by Ball (1987) in Great Britain, and Blasé (1987, 1990) in the United States. Subsequent studies by Malen, et al, began to illustrate the dynamic that micropolitics play in day-to-day school governance. The effectiveness of school leaders is often measured by their ability to influence teachers, fellow administrators, and central office administration (Yukl & Falbe, 1990).

To better understand the role of micropolitics in the context of educational leadership, and its effects on the decision making process that affect the performance of schools, I will begin with a brief review of politics as applied to organizational structures, followed by an overview of the commonly agreed qualities of micropolitics as defined by Kessle, Cole, & Seggig (1969). These qualities include leadership, role, group, attitude, communication, and power. This literature review will conclude with a brief discussion of favoritism, and the role favoritism plays on the micropolitics between administrative leadership teams and teacher leaders.

#### **Brief Review of Politics**

If we are to define schools as loosely-coupled organizations (Weick, 1976), a study of the structure and process of school governance should be conceptually rooted in politics and organizational theory. Every day school principals and their leadership teams make decisions

that have a direct impact on students, parents, and teachers, and will ultimately affect the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom.

Merriam-Webster defines politics as “the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy.” Merriam-Webster further defines politics as a, “competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership.” Bacharach and Lawler (1980) describe politics as the “tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real or symbolic resources.” Pfeffer (1981) further expands the definition of politics to include struggle:

“Activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or discensus (difference of opinion) about choice.”

When individuals engage in political activity, there is the implication that there is a deliberate and well-planned effort made by competing parties to engage in the process of exerting influence on the other (Myers and Allen 1980, Burns, 1961). Because increased influence and the accompanying power associated with influence is the desired outcome of political activity, individual members in an organization are regarded as a potential political resource that, if swayed, can be used to change the balance of power within the organization. When priorities are not aligned with the stated goals of the organization conflicting political action may be taken to achieve more desired outcomes (Ball 1987, Hoyle 1986, Pfeffer 1981).

Covert power plays are an example of political action that is in conflict with stated goals and policies of organizations. While not always obvious, influence, perception, changing behavior, and the creation of “alternate realities” may result in decisions made by a select group of individuals behind closed doors. These “back stage” negotiations are intended to create an environment enabling personal power and protection of the status quo. By limiting those with

opposing views the opportunity to express their opinions, decisions may not be aligned with needs of the organization. Decisions that specifically improve one's career without regard to student welfare, or the use of pressure politics to influence decisions are examples of power plays. Closed-door meetings can digress into gossip sessions, where those holding opposing views with those of leadership can be accused of incompetence, while formal meetings have rules that dictate how criticism is handled. Criticism should only be allowed when the person making the observation does not have a vested interest in the topic because public criticism in an open forum can be considered a conflict of interest.

### **Fundamental Concepts of Micropolitics**

Webb (2008) theorized that in the past, micropolitical studies were conducted to define power relationship between authority and subordinates, and discover how power is used to influence others. In educational settings, the tension created by the struggle between multiple interests has made the development of a definite theoretical or methodological model of micropolitics unclear and difficult to define. Power struggles occur in organizations that are not observed. The relationship between formal authority to demand compliance with the subtle ability to influence others to do what is wanted is necessary for the definition of a process that can be observed and quantified.

Webb theorized that formal authority granted in traditional organizational hierarchy is considered the normal distribution of power. The study of the authority-influence relationship is important to researchers of micropolitics because it gives a definable way to investigate the relationship of control and resistance. These relationships can manifest in many forms depending on the variables and the complexity of the relationship being studied. A simple exchange between a traditional authority figure and a subordinate implies a direct relationship where expected outcomes are a result of the direct interaction between the two. Complex interactions

may include gender, race, and position with each variable having an impact on communication, negotiation, and outcome, making analysis more difficult. The descriptive pronoun associated with position may be of more consequence than those found in a simple authority-influence relationship, and warrant consideration when analyzing communication, negotiation, and outcome of exchanges.

Public schools are highly structured environments and subject to local, state, and federal regulations, creating power struggles that cross both macro and micro political arenas. Formal groups with common interests operate in, and are controlled by, traditional organizational management techniques. When decisions are made in private, a form of stealth power, where authority and influence work in partnership, may create outcomes that may not be anticipated. Covert power is often used to establish authority and maintain control. Panoptic power, which is not overt or easily recognized, influences an individual's desires while changing their behavior. When the establishment of pre-determined standards and expectations are designed to reflect the desired beliefs of the principal, status quo is achieved. The power and the influence wielded by the principal can be confirmed by the degree of awareness that teachers, parents, and members of the community have of these beliefs and their supporting structures.

Teacher reality is constructed in relation to macro and micro structures. Realities include the building, calendar, budget, gender, race, accountability, and local and district policy. Power is believed to be distributed in a segmented manner where it is considered a property and not a resource.

Teachers and others in schools are usually unaware of the segmented distribution of power, and often support causes promoted by leadership as a means to achieve political or social gain. The relationship between macro and micropolitical environments can be best described as a

symbiotic relationship where each has a direct influence on the other. Teachers sometimes serve as complacent actors, unaware that they propagate the environmental atmosphere that they overtly oppose.

## **Leadership**

Educational leadership has evolved over the past thirty years with a shift from reliance on the principal making all important decisions affecting the school to the introduction of administrative leadership teams, comprised of campus administrators, department coordinators, and others holding formal and informal leadership positions, to address the complex issues that modern schools face. To understand how schools as organizations have changed and place this evolution in perspective, Crow, Hausman, & Scribner (2002) have identified four characteristics that define earlier educational systems.

Prior to the introduction of administrative leadership teams, principals followed policies and procedures dictated by the central office administration developed to avoid the possibility of litigations, grievances, or complaints. Standardized policies and procedures provided principals with a safety net that could be invoked to answer questions or concerns raised by individuals who believed that they had been wronged.

Adherence to policy contributed to a de-emphasis of human agency, or the ability of individuals to engage in the decision making process and exercise a degree of self-determination. Teachers and other school employees were not considered assets other than being a teacher, a custodian, a bus driver, or a cafeteria worker, and their thoughts and opinions were neither solicited nor welcomed. Prior to collaborative decision making, schools operated as departmentalized institutions with little or no interaction between disciplines or across job titles.

Similar to other public school employees of that era, principals had limited contact with other principals, members of the community, or with individual teachers. When there was a need for interaction between groups, the principal acted as the mediator, controlling interactions and contact between groups or individuals.

The emphasis was on efficiency, with the quantity rather than the quality used as the criteria for the measurement of success. Teacher evaluation was based on infrequent observations following a district script that concentrated on teacher behavior rather than student learning. Student achievement was measured by teacher designed assignments, tests, quizzes, and the quantity of curriculum covered during the school term. The emphasis was on rationality and limiting ambiguity by control of what was taught and learned.

Recent changes include an increased emphasis on individualization of instruction, a complex, engaging and rigorous curriculum, and realization that constant change will define the new roles of school leadership. One size fits all instructional approaches have been replaced by differentiation, helping students to use problem solving techniques to acquire a deep understanding of concepts rather than covering material at the surface level. These changes require greater emphasis on choice and self-determination in the educational process. The conflict created by crossing traditional curricular boundaries to facilitate deep learning require constant monitoring and negotiation to address evermore complex issues.

Increased societal demands have led to the implementation of shared leadership to meet these needs of innovation and creativity in instruction and assessment (Seashore, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). In the shared leadership model, leadership and instructional practice are related and have an indirect, yet significant, influence on student achievement. Many factors are influenced by leadership, including the establishment of academic objectives, the effectiveness



of classroom management techniques and strategies, the implementation of differentiated learning expectations, and the content and learning characteristics associated with improved student achievement (Brophy 1986).

Ball (1987) was instrumental in introducing the concept of micropolitics and studying its effect in a public school. Much of his work focused on the identification and definition of the style of leadership that their principals or “heads” employed in the day-to-day operation of their schools. Over time, Ball identified three unique “leadership styles” that can help define and analyze the preferences that school leaders use.

Ball suggested that consideration be given to the alignment between the leadership style of the principal and the style of those being led. Adjustments necessary to align leadership style with teachers create a social relationship of compromise and negotiation. While some principals could abandon their preferred style of leadership to meet the needs of specific situations, leadership style can be a limiting factor in social interactions. Principals are recognized for the successes and blamed for the failures, and often tempted to sacrifice positive social interaction and relationships to maintain the consistency, stability, and authority that they believe is necessary for success. Ball identified three major leadership styles: the interpersonal leadership style, the managerial leadership style, and political leadership style.

Principals who prefer interpersonal leadership work to establish a personal relationship with all employees on campus. Teachers are encouraged to think for themselves with conflict resolution achieved by the engagement of informal one-on-one discussions between the principal and teachers experiencing conflict. Loyalty to the principal is rewarded by admission to an informal inner circle perceived by those not as favoritism. These principals assume that unless they hear otherwise, teachers are doing what they are supposed to, and if there are complaints or

concerns, those issues should be brought to them for resolution. Interpersonal leadership style principals do not observe or follow a formal chain of command believing that the success of school is dependent upon the relationships that they have developed between themselves and teachers. Campus decisions are made on an individually and are dependent on the quality of the relationship between the principal and the teacher. This approach to decision making creates minimal disagreement, with decisions made in an *ad hoc* manner.

The public image of interpersonal style principals can be quite different from the private, “behind the scenes” approach to decision making. Special interest groups lobby behind closed doors pleading their cases, so when a decision is made, there may not be a clear picture of what occurred, who possessed what degree of informal power, and how those who hold informal power influence the decision making process. Teachers outside of the inner circle are left in the dark, often frustrated with feelings of insecurity. Interpersonal leaders take advantage of charisma, and their style of leadership often leads to unstable relationships and a lack of authority and respect (Simon, Smithburg & Thompson, 1950).

Managerial leaders are function oriented, and preferring a structural approach when running a school. They view themselves as “chief executives,” surrounding themselves with a “senior management team” of veteran teachers, trusted department heads, and other individuals that they believe are highly respected, using them as their communicators of policy and decisions. Decisions are made using the formal structures of meetings and committees, with well-defined roles and responsibilities that eliminate the perception of hidden agendas. They rely on established lines of hierarchy and communication with the discussion of issues flowing upward through formalized committees. School evaluation is determined by comparing the performance of the school to clearly defined target goals and objectives. Planning is team driven and position

oriented. Teachers not part of the “senior management team” rarely, if ever, play a part in the decision making process, nor are they invited to participate in meaningful discussions since these managerial leaders separate the administrative leadership team from the rest of the school. The message is clear – leadership establishes policy that teachers are expected to implement, creating an atmosphere of separation between leadership and teachers. Procedures are more important than involvement, allowing the administrative leadership team to be distanced from problems of implementation.

Adversarial leaders rely on public dialogue and debate, with decisions made in a highly charged atmosphere of confrontation and competition. Adversarial leaders enjoy public performance, driven by questions concerning the effectiveness of teaching rather than organizational procedure. In an environment of open debate, political skills are necessary to succeed in the unorganized and uncertain arenas of public debate requiring negotiation without preparation. Alliances are built, and opponents are debated head on, often without formal support. Adversarial leaders like to participate in discussions and engage in challenges that are limited to issues that they are well versed, framing issues in such a way that they have a natural advantage, carefully planning and scheduling discussion of issues in a time and place of their own choosing.

Principals who identify with the authoritarian leadership style prefer to make their point, and these pointed statements are their primary tool of attack. They like to control those who oppose them by using techniques of avoidance to deny opponents the opportunity to present their side or by simply ignoring them. If they feel that is to their advantage, authoritarian principals will occasionally engage in deception as a means of control, reducing communication to a one-way monologue. Discussion is regarded as a dangerous risk and a source of threat to their authority,

making any confrontation to be avoided at all costs since it may expose weakness. The status-quo and established policies and procedures must be preserved at all cost, and are important to the preservation of their authority. When hiring new members to their staff, they exercise great care to avoid hiring anyone who might question the way that they do things, opting to hire those who would blindly follow their established policies, regardless of teaching competency. The goal of the authoritarian principal is to eliminate differing opinions that may become a critical mass that may create problems that the principal cannot or will not address, or weaken their self-perceived authority and control.

Another leadership style found in schools is empowerment leadership. Defined as a set of “behaviors that share power with subordinates” (Vecchio et al., 2010, p. 531), empowerment leadership is believed to improve teacher efficacy, allow teachers the autonomy to exercise a greater degree of self-determination in the classroom, and distribute power to teachers rather than holding power over them (Gkorezis, 2016) Much like interpersonal leaders identified by Ball (1987), empowerment leaders prefer to establish a personal relationship with individuals rather than with groups. Rather than telling them what to do and how do it, teachers are encouraged to engage in creative behavior, take risks, try new ideas, and experiment with instructional strategies.

Empowerment leadership has its drawbacks. The inconsistency in the quality of relationships that a principal has with teachers because relationships are individualized and based on personal attributes is caused by variations in the amount of time invested in the relationship, the exercise of authority, and the allocation of resources (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982).

Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) suggest that while there has been a significant amount of research devoted to “how” leadership functions in the school, the study of “what”

leadership does has not received enough attention and must be considered when developing a conceptual framework to understand the internal dynamics of leadership in practice.

Early educational research focused on individual agency or the macro-structure in the shaping of what leaders do. Employing the principles of distributed leadership practice as a framework for research and analysis of leaders, the thoughts, memories, and feelings that leaders contemplate and reflect upon were identified. These practices contributed to the development of distributive leadership that is based on four ideas:

Leadership tasks and functions often focus on short-term concerns and tend to overlook long term solution of problems. An ongoing process, school improvement must undergo continual revisions. Examples include, but are not limited to, the development of a relevant mission statement, analysis, and implementation of an effective and appropriate disciplinary policy, instructional supervision, and the development and support of a healthy school culture and climate. To understand and analyze practice in leadership, the steps, and process required to achieve these ends must be examined in detail because tasks that appear to be similar can, in the end, be quite different.

Task enactment, the implementation of desired tasks, reflects the ability of leadership to influence teachers, and align what is stated to what is done and accomplished. As tasks are rolled out for implementation, they are rarely achieved in a linear, step by step fashion. Implementation of a vision or idea is evolution of thought and practice, and the more clearly that desired outcomes are communicated to those who carry out tasks, fidelity of the implementation is improved.

Social distribution refers to the level of involvement that formal and informal leaders' take in the implementation of tasks. Responsibility can be assigned to multiple individuals, or to

specific individuals depending of the task to be completed. Distribution of task responsibility contributes to an atmosphere of interdependence where groups work to accomplish a desired goal.

When leadership tasks are assigned based on expertise or ability to lead in specific situations or circumstances, this is referred to as situational distribution of task enactment (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

Early leadership literature assumed that the personal traits held by formal leaders associated the school principal with “great man” theories, identifying the desired traits of style, the ability to perform, and individual personality (Burns, 1978). Self-confidence, sociability, adaptability, and cooperativeness were believed to enable leaders to inspire teachers to achieve excellence (Yukl, 1981).

### **Role in the Organization**

Role Theory (Hofmann, Morgeson, & Guerras, 2003) defines the duties of leaders and followers, and members perform duties based on their role. In organizations, role is a learned behavior (Kessel, & Cole, 1970). Roles can be recognized by an organization, or by individuals within the organization, and is defined by the perceptions and expectations of society. When there is uncertainty, organizations rely on myths and symbols to redouble effort, providing psychological support. In organizations, the importance of what is said carries more weight than what is done, so the creation of myths, heroes, rituals, ceremonies, and stories create energy and purpose for the organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The culture of an organization is the substance that holds it together, uniting it with common goals to meet desired ends.

Roles in leadership are categorized as a subset of management (Mintzberg, 1973). Ten leadership roles have been identified, and school administrators must be prepared to assume the

appropriate role as required by the situation. The figurehead, the spokesperson, the negotiator, the coach and motivator, the team builder, the technical problem solver, the entrepreneur, the strategic planner, and the executor are roles that school leaders must be prepared to assume.

## **Trust**

Another important factor of an effective principal administrative leadership team relationship is trust. Trust has a positive impact on the culture of the school (Seashore, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). The level of trust that teachers have in the decision making capacity of administration has been found to be a predictor of overall teacher satisfaction, and encouraging teachers to participate in the decision making process. Decisions that address the establishment of academic objectives, the support of effective classroom management, and the implementation strategies of differentiated learning expectations that are grounded in knowledge of content and understanding of student learning characteristics have been associated with a higher degree of student achievement.

The importance of effective instructional strategies and support cannot be underestimated. Administrative leadership teams must understand how instruction is delivered and received (teaching and learning), the relationship between the two, knowledge of the curriculum, the ability to provide appropriate constructive criticism with suggestions for improvement, and provide an underlying system of instructional support.

In collaborative schools, teacher leaders work with administrators to acknowledge the increased importance of collective, shared efforts to improve instruction that is innovative, practical, and workable.

Administrative leadership teams should take an active role in the design of professional development programs that not only emphasizes curricular related knowledge and skills, but

provides teachers with opportunities to increase their understanding and ability to provide emotional and social support for students as they face increasingly complex peer and societal pressures.

### **Group Interaction**

The management of opinion and influence of individuals by those who hold formal power to obtain ends not endorsed by the organization, or attempt to gain organizationally sanctioned ends using non-sanctioned influence is the core of organizational politics (Myers and Allen, 1980, Willner, 2011). Formalized hierarchical structures in organizations are rarely neutral or go unchallenged because some individuals believe that they are, or should be, more privileged than others. These individuals continually attempt to increase their scope of influence and act to change the balance of power in their favor. The continual struggle and shifting of the balance of power is a reality in organizations due to cost and difficulty of regulation. Organizational actions result in continual redevelopment and refinement of organizational structure with new structures encouraging actions in response (Giddens, 1984).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggest that the legitimacy of an organization, and ultimately their survival in a competitive environment, is dependent upon the ability of the organization to meet expectations placed on them by society by embedding practices and procedures designed to meet these demands. Formal structures of organizations, including schools, reflect myths rather than reality when it comes to the outcomes that they profess to meet. The difference between the formal organizational structure of the school and the daily operations and activities that take place in schools have a defined organizational hierarchy delineating a top to bottom structure that allegedly coordinates the functions of individuals while at the same time meeting the needs of increasingly complex societal expectations. The assumption that coordination and control of



activity are critical in successful organizations is undermined by the reality that structural elements are loosely associated with one another, and rules are more often than not violated, resulting in decisions that are unexpected and potentially damaging.

Loose-coupling in organizations permit avoidance of the need to react to every change that occurs in the environment (Weick 1976). Loose-coupling is a mechanism that provides multiple external and independent ways to measure conditions that may affect the organization. Loose-coupling also allows organizations to implement localized control that may be necessary to make limited “mutations” or adjustments of operational procedures that give the organization the ability to meet local needs without compromising the fidelity of the organizational structure. By making these adjustments, the failure in one area of the organization doesn’t affect other areas, permitting organizations the freedom to enjoy self-determination. In an educational setting, loose-coupling gives principals and teachers the independence and control that they believe is necessary for them to express individuality in curriculum and instruction while satisfying the expectations of policy. Loosely-coupled organizations are more economical to operate because there is minimal oversight and coordination necessary for the organization to thrive.

Schools are inherently loosely-coupled organizations. Exhibiting causal independence, with infrequent evaluation of activities, most schools operate as independent organizations with minimal oversight by the central office. Oversight is often conducted with a degree of freedom of choice given to the campus, often with an absence of clear linkages. School organizational structure is not coterminous with boundaries of daily activities, with little significant changes in results, regardless of planning or instruction.

Teachers form the core organizational structure, while the administrative leadership team serves as management. Planning and action in schools are often unrelated, and despite attempts

to implement alternate pathways to achieve desired goals, they almost always lead to the same end. With a lack of planning and coordination between academic departments within a school, with the absence of consistent oversight, regulation, or supervision, the result is planned unresponsiveness since individuals in loosely-coupled positions of responsibility, and while responsive to one another, remain independent in their identity. For example, the counseling department is loosely-coupled with the administration, with each office serving a unique and separate function necessary for the success of the school (Glassman 1973, March & Olsen 1975). In organizations, systems with few common variables are considered independent. In schools, the superintendent, the principal, and the vice principal comprise the administrative system. Teachers, students, and parents comprise a separate system considered loosely-coupled since there are few common variables.

Task conflict affects team effectiveness, job performance, and job satisfaction (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002). Groups are defined as individuals who have characteristics in common with one another, with interactions over time in pursuit of a common goal (Truman, 1971). When groups interact, they seek equilibrium to provide stability in consistency of interactions between members to keep the group cohesive. This equilibrium and stability can be disrupted by conflict between members of the group or when change occurs in the hierarchical structure of leadership. When this happens, individuals may engage in inappropriate behaviors like complaining or spreading rumors to protect their identity within the organization. Members may also become active by joining opposing groups to compensate for the anxiety they experience when groups undergo change.

Collections of individuals sharing one or more common attributes and making claims against other groups in society based on common attributes are known as “Interest Groups” (Truman,

1971). These groups range from highly organized and effective to extremely disorganized, depending on membership and goals of the group. The quality and frequency of interactions within interest groups determine effectiveness and define efforts groups take to achieve desired goals.

Malen (1994) theorized that since schools are faced with complex societal pressures, rely on limited resources, and required to meet the demands of multiple stakeholders who struggle over value-laden issues, conflict must be managed. The process that schools use to address conflict is inherently political in nature. Schools, mini-political systems operating as governmental structures, are tasked with the responsibility of responsive in a diverse, and often fractured community. In a political analysis, power is the most important factor that influences how decisions are made in schools. The argument can be made that, when analyzing school politics, the way that power is acquired and used in exerting influence and control is essential for an understanding of school governance.

In a macro-political environment, policy and the rule of law rely on mandates, prohibition, restriction of freedoms, and censure as punitive actions designed to control the behavior of the groups and individuals being governed. As independent organizations embedded within a larger political structure of the educational system, schools rely on micropolitical conversations to govern day-to-day operation. Micropolitical conversations create change by shaping the preferences, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals and groups of individuals working in schools for the purpose of achieving intended goals subtly by changing attitudes and the disposition of individuals and groups through enhancement of skills and development of capacity to shape behavior (Burris, Rogers, Mannix, Hendron, & Oldroid, 2009).

## **Team Dynamics**

Team performance, defined as process-oriented interaction, has been addressed by business literature as an essential component of quality team efficiency (Glickman *et al.*, 1987, Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). Team performance is reliant upon the health of interpersonal (micropolitical) relationships between members of team.

Three factors affect team performance. Cohesion is the sense of unity each member of the team feels in being a part of the team (Shaw, 1976). Dyer (1987) theorizes that transparent and open communication, combined with timely feedback, are essential for the team to accomplish desired goals and function as a group. Effective management of conflict is essential to team performance (Dyer 1987, 1995).

Five positive factors have been identified by Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler (2004). Team cohesion, the ability to manage conflict, a shared vision, commitment by the leader to the vision, the ability of the leader to empower members of the team, and the ability to test conclusions with intellectual stimulation that lead to an effective and functional team analysis are important to team effectiveness.

A clarification should be made between the terms working groups and leadership teams. Lencioni (2012) makes this distinction by characterizing a leadership team as a “small group of people who are collectively responsible for achieving a common objective for their organization” in contrast to working group that is defined as “a collection of individuals who work independently to achieve a goal” (p. 21). Tasks are assigned in working groups for individuals to be completed, while leadership teams are driven by collective responsibility and common objectives in an atmosphere of “vulnerability-based” trust (p.27).

True leadership teams take longer to form and mature than do working groups. To cultivate a sense of collective responsibility and common goals, members of leadership; teams spend time to reflect individually, share thoughts and ideas with their teammates without ego or fear of judgement, and be receptive to diverse opinions, creating an environment of “vulnerability-based” trust.

Conflict exists in all organizations, even within the most trusting relationships. As an administrative leadership team approaches vulnerability-based trust relationships, conflict can be positively resolved with a balance of constructive criticism and critical examination. With vulnerability-based trust, team members can deliberate opposing viewpoints without fear of judgement to make the best decision.

Commitment and accountability contribute to the team’s capability to manage and resolve conflict. Teams that clarify goals, identify specific measurable outcomes, and hold members accountable for results, experience higher levels of success.

### **Attitude**

Attitude has a significant impact on micropolitics in any organizational structure, and the school is no exception. West (1999) states that, in groups, the attitudes and behaviors of members are observed by others, with “abnormal behavior” reported back to leadership. Individuals who make an effort to be a part of a group but do not quite meet the accepted norms of behavior for membership are considered “deviants”. Often the brunt of jokes, deviants are allowed to associate with the group, giving other members of the group a feeling of superiority. In return, these outcasts enjoy the protection of group membership when their cause is challenged by competing groups.

## **Communication**

The ability to communicate, effectively, with minimal misunderstanding between members of an organization is imperative for the success of organizations. The perception of an individual is their reality, and so the way that thoughts, ideas, and information are shared shapes reality. More than a simple exchange of information, effective communication is a “multidimensional skill that constitutes different aspects,” and are dependent upon social setting (Radhaswamy & Zia, 2011).

Early studies of communication focused on skills. Weaver (1949) identified three skills believed to be necessary for effective exchanges of ideas in organizations. Technical communication skills enhance the accuracy and clarity of information when exchanged from one individual to another, or to a group of individuals. Even with a high degree of clarity, the potential for misunderstanding exists and is likely when semantics are unclear, resulting in misinterpretation of the message by the recipient.

Selective listening is another source of miscommunication (Weaver, 1949). With the immense volume of information shared daily, school administrators must remain diligent, always on the lookout for misunderstanding, ready to respond to clarify ambiguous points. Clarity of communication can change based on the influence and perceived effectiveness of the sender, impacting the degree of the desired result.

Turaga (2016) suggested that the “Sender –Message-Channel-Receiver” (SMCR), a communication model developed by David Berlo (1960) is an example of a basic organizational communication model that warrants consideration (Bruckmann & Hartley, 2001). Assuming that messages are sent, received, and understood within a context, if the context is unclear, misunderstandings can happen at any point in the communication process. Messages can be

unclear, ambiguous, contain contradictory information, or instructions that, without adequate explanation, can be misinterpreted, ignored, or opposed. The listener must be receptive for the message to be effective and understand the intent within the context in which it was sent.

Acknowledgment of understanding is essential and can be verbal, non-verbal, a re-statement of the message, or the asking of clarifying questions. Cultural bias on the part of either the sending or receiving party can contribute to the potential of misunderstanding (Turaga, 2016).

A more contemporary model of communication, based on the Leader-Member Exchange Theory proposed by Graen, Novak, and Sommerkamp (1982), helps describe relationships between principals and teachers. This relationship can affect teacher performance depending on the level of sharing of information, availability to resources, time, emotional support, and the degree of autonomy that results in teacher empowerment (Arif, Zahid, Kashif, & Sindhu, 2017).

Establishing individual relationships with teachers can be a dual-edged sword. Teachers who establish an open relationship with the principal enjoy benefits that often are withheld from those who have not established relationships. Teachers with minimal or strained relationships with the principal may experience denial, or feel ostracized when views and perceptions are shared in the teachers' lounge (Bolino and Turnley, 2009).

An unintended outcome of the individualization of leader-member exchanges is the possibility that two opposing groups can be created. The in-group benefits from positive feedback and support. The out-group suffering from weak relationships, lack trust, and engage in infrequent interactions with the administration, with fewer rewards and benefits (Arif, Zahid, Kashif, & Sindhu, 2010, p.34).

When communication is limited to formal exchanges that lack a common meaning, the likelihood of conflict is increased. When teachers experience frustration or conflict in

communication with leadership, they are less inclined to participate in a collaborative effort to improve instruction and student achievement (Hayes & Ross, 1989).

## **Power**

In his 1957 treatise, Dahl theorized that power is necessary for one to exert influence, control, and authority over another individual or group of individuals. He suggested that it was power that gave an individual the ability to influence another to do something that the other would not normally do. The degree by which one could influence another into doing something that they would normally not do is dependent on four variables. Variable one is the source of the power. Power can be derived from formal authority granted by position, reputation, or informal authority. Variable two is the means available for those in authority to exert their power or influence over others. Formal methods of control include mandates, punitive measures for those who resist, and rewards for those who comply. Informal control can be achieved through either inclusion or exclusion from a group, with the assumption made that the individual to be controlled desires to be associated with a well-respected, powerful individual or group of peers. Failure to comply could lead to ostracism.

Variable three is the degree and intensity of action necessary to influence individuals to do what is desired. The degree and intensity required to effect change is dependent upon the level and resistance of opposition. Variable four is the desired outcome. The outcome must be worth the effort of the overall influence and effects of power.

Three factors define a power relationship. First, there must be a delay between the actions taken by the individual in power to cause another to respond. An immediate response suggests agreement with the request. Second, there must be an obvious connection between the actions of the individual holding power with the response. If there is an uncertain connection, the response may be coincidental. Finally, there must be the threat of punitive or negative consequences for an



individual who chooses not to comply because power relationships are based on implied threats for non-compliance.

In a more contemporary publication, Coleman and Ferguson (2014) describes four power relationships found in organizations. The first is the formal top-down authoritarianism, or “power over others”, where role in the organization defines the level of power that individual hold. As individuals work collaboratively to solve problems and make decisions, they employ “power with others”, supporting one another. When responsibilities are assigned and are independent from other team members, “power apart from others” is used to achieve the desired goal. “Power under others” occurs when alliances are made between individuals who normally hold little formal power to lobby for change. All of these relationships impact the micropolitics of the administrative leadership team and therefore, the relationships between administrators, teachers, students, and parents (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014, pp.12 – 13.).

Power relationships can backfire. A negative power relationship develops when an individual decides to ignore the wishes of the authority, choosing either to do nothing or act in direct opposition to the desires of the authority.

### **Favoritism**

Social Exchange Theory suggests that interactions in organizations are based on “give and take” relationships (Kelly & Thibaut, 1979), and dependent upon the perception of balance between the give and take, the perception of the relationship deserved, and the opportunities for improvement of other relationships (Cook & Emerson, 1978). Favoritism occurs when an individual holding formal power favors another person, based not on performance, but on a social relationship, at the expense of the third party (Khatri, Tsang, & Begley, 2006). The degree

of perceived favoritism in an organization is a predictor of the level of trust employees have in their leadership (Turhan, 2014).

Blasé (1988) theorized that favoritism is a political phenomenon. Defined as the inequitable or unfair use of authority and power to protect power and control, many inconsistencies in the way that an organization operates can be linked to favoritism. Because of divergent thinking and philosophies, while our society recognizes the value of plurality, disagreement, and contention often result (Greenfield, 1985).

In their effort to be successful, often under significant pressure to do so, educational leaders often resort to persuasion, calculation, guile, persistent threat, or sheer force to achieve their preferred ends (Greenfield, 1985). When the actions of administrators violate the ideals, beliefs, or values of those under their supervision, the credibility of the administrators is questioned and can result in a lack of trust for both the leader and the organization. These perceived violations of moral and ethical standards produce increased levels of teacher stress, role conflict, and the feeling of alienation. These relationships between teachers' ideals and an administrator's power to violate these ideals can be extremely harmful (Goldner, Ritti, & Ference 1977, Burns, 1978). Leaders often establish personal relationships with their subordinates that can be used to enhance and influence both parties unfairly (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai 2004). Favoritism not only flow from top to bottom but from bottom to top as well. Sometimes subordinates use their relationships in order to leverage access to unattainable resources, taking advantage of their preferred relationships with their leaders. This relationship creates an informal inner circle of close friends as well as an outer circle of those less favored. Faced with difficult or unpopular decisions, many leaders rely on what they consider the expert opinions of their close inner circle of friends, potentially ignoring better advice from those employees outside of the trusted inner

circle. The strength of these personal relationships also can affect the willingness by some to participate and may have an influence on the processing of viewpoints.

For a leader to make good decisions, it requires that all relevant information be considered from all group members who may have a stake in the outcome. Favoritism suggests that friends of those in power have a higher level of influence and enjoy increased interdependence in interactions with leadership, share common socio-emotional goals, heightened companionship, and rely on each other for emotional support. Friends tend to be more open with each other and tend to resolve conflicts more often than do strangers.

High performance in schools is based on the congruence or similarity of ideas, and often there are groups having differing opinions or views that operate outside of the inner circle of influence. Members of the inner circle include leadership and friends who interact in a friendly, open, and more supportive way than those who are not members of the inner circle (Simon, Smithburg & Thompson, 1950).

Communication and interactions with those in the outer circle tend to be more reserved and formal. Those in the inner circle enjoy a higher level of psychological safety, and more attention to their ideas, views, and suggestions that lead to greater participation in the decision-making process. The perception of leadership is that those in the inner circle possess a higher level of expertise, make a greater contribution to the organization, and therefore, they receive more recognition and respect. Leaders also pay more attention to the contribution of inner circle members, and welcome their diverse opinions more openly than similar opinions from outer circle individuals.

## **Climate and Culture**

Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) define school climate as the “quality and character of school life.” School climate is rooted in the patterns of experiences that one has in school life, reflecting the norms, values, relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures that help teachers and students to feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe. School climate is a phenomenon that reflects the norms and values of parents, teachers, students, and administration and can be heavily influenced by the perceptions that these individuals hold about the school. The importance of school climate has been recognized since the early twentieth century (Perry 1908), however an organized study of how climate affects the school or how to evaluate the effects of school climate on student achievement and school success did not occur until the mid-century.

There is no single agreed definition of school climate. While ambiguous terms such as atmosphere, feeling, tone setting, or milieu have been used in the past (Freiberg, 1999; Homana, Barber, & Torney-Purta, 2006; Tagiuri, 1968), Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) suggest a more current definition that school climate refers to the quality and character of school life. Quality refers to the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structure that contribute to emotional and social well-being, and a feeling of safety necessary to facilitate learning.

On the other hand, school culture has been defined as “historically-transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community” (Stolp & Smith, 1994). School culture is far more complicated than school climate, and provides educational leaders with a comprehensive framework with which to analyze problems and complex

relationships within the school. A simple definition of school culture is the “commonly held beliefs of teachers, students, and principals.” (Heckman, 1993).

There is no doubt that the effects of culture and climate overlap in the school setting (Miner, 1995). Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, (1991) contrasts the two concepts by suggesting that climate can be viewed through a psychological lens while culture can be viewed through an anthropological lens. Simply put, climate refers to behavior while the focus of culture is on values and norms.

Research has identified several strong correlations between strong, healthy school culture and improved academic performance of students in the school. One study, conducted by Fyans and Maehr (1990), examined the effects of five dimensions of school culture: a rigorous curriculum, comparative achievement, recognition of student success, the perception of the school community, and school goals. In schools where these areas were strong, student motivation to learn was significantly higher than in schools that did not.

In another study, Thacker and McInerney (1992) investigated the effects of implementation of a clear mission statement, specific outcome-based goals for students, an aligned curriculum, targeted staff development, and campus decision making. The results indicated that there was a ten per cent reduction in the number of students failing the state mandated test from the year before.

Prior to engaging in efforts designed to make positive and meaningful changes in the school culture, the principal, as the instructional leader, must first have a thorough understanding of the current culture (Leithwood, 2001). When there is statement of purpose, clear expectations, and who it should serve, it works well. When the complex patterns of beliefs, values, attitudes,

expectations, ideas, and behaviors are not aligned with the needs of the students or the community, the school is less than successful.

Ritchhart (2015) identifies eight forces that shape school culture that administrative leadership teams need to consider when engaged in the decision making process:

1. Expectations must be established and clearly communicated that focus is on teaching and learning rather making a grade. Students must become independent learners seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts being taught.
2. Language is what we use to convey our thoughts, understanding, and feelings. Choosing appropriate language makes learning personal, strengthens relationships and creates an environment conducive to learning.
3. It takes time to learn and understand complex concepts.
4. By modeling desired behaviors, teachers, and administrators communicate clear messages of expectations.
5. All students should have the opportunity to learn.
6. Establishment of routines helps teachers and students assimilate into the patterns of the organization.
7. Daily interactions are the most influential factor shaping school culture.
8. The learning environment must be aligned with the desired culture, and conducive to learning.

Real and sustainable change is best achieved through changing school culture rather than changing organizational structures, policies, or operating procedures (Kytle & Bogotch, 2000). To shift the campus culture in a positive manner, principals, teachers, and students must come to an agreement of shared beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas, and behaviors that will

move the school in the desired direction. They then must learn to model behaviors that reflect the desired outcome. The behavior of those in leadership positions as they communicate with teachers, students, and parents what they believe is important, and conversely, that which is unimportant. Leaders must also collaboratively work to develop a shared vision, based on the history, traditions, values, and beliefs of members of the school community to craft a unique culture that fosters high academic success and meaningful learning by students.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand how micropolitical conversations in administrative leadership teams affect the campus decision making process, and impact the climate, culture, and student achievement. An inquiry of how of diverse leadership styles impact and shape these relationships is embedded in this study. The methods chapter will identify research design chosen, processes used, and reasons for selections. A description of data sources, data collection, and data analysis are discussed.

Collaborative administrative team decision making is a relatively new development in campus organizational structure, and the interactions and relationships between administrative team members directly influence how and why decisions are made. A case study design was selected, employing qualitative research approaches including interviews and analysis of supporting documents. Eight participants were invited to participate from each of three schools and seventeen accepted the invitation to participate. Each participant was asked similar questions in an open-ended, semi-structured protocol.

#### **Methods**

The selection of the research design chosen for this study was based on the desire to gain insight into the complex relationships of administrative teams as they perform their duties. Since the intent of the study is to understand and describe the micropolitical relationships between members of the administrative leadership team, and the impact that these relationships play on the decision making process, qualitative methods are appropriate. Relationships and impacts of decisions are bounded within the context of the school, and the researcher had little or no control over variables, making a case study appropriate (Yin, 2002).



Case studies enable researchers to study a phenomenon in depth within the context of time, activity, and place (Plummer, 2001, Creswell, 2003, 2006), and since the focus of the study is on the specific phenomenon of micropolitical relationships, an exploratory case study can provide insight to both the process, and the product of the efforts of the administrative leadership teams (Stake, 2006, Yin, 2014). Stake (1995) emphasized that case studies are appropriate when the intent of the researcher is to generate of a body of knowledge, while Plummer (2001) suggests that case studies can give us insight into the “collective memories and imagined communities” within the context of the time and place. The outcome of case studies contributes to the body of knowledge of specific problems, issues, or concepts that are related to individuals, groups, or organizations in social and political contexts (Yin, 2002). To investigate the effect that micropolitics have on administrative leadership team relationships, Bromley (1986) advocates that the collection of data take place in the natural setting. All interviews were conducted at the participant’s school, and participants were free to elaborate their responses to questions with campus specific anecdotal stories and examples.

Case study research is not without its critics. Case studies are often viewed as exploratory in nature, used to determine if a topic is appropriate for further research efforts. The reliability and validity of case studies is dependent upon the ability of the researcher to protect against bias and generalize findings. To reduce the possibility of bias, the researcher employed strict protocols for collection and analyzation of data.

The primary reason for selection of an exploratory case study for this research was the flexibility that a case study offers to apply the same data collected to different cases. The study was designed to incorporate two types of cases. The first case is the individual campus,

providing insight into the impact that micropolitical conversations have on the specific school where they worked. The second case was bounded by the role of the subject on campus.

### **Data Sources**

Purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling strategy for this study. Purposive sampling permits the collection of information rich data when studying a particular phenomenon in depth (Patton, 1990). Patton also believed that purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on information that is to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling was the preferred choice given the formative nature of the topic, and the need for pertinent information and understanding. Erlandson et al., explained, “Purposive sampling...increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher’s ability to identify emerging themes” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 82).

To improve triangulation, eight participants from each campus were invited to participate. The decision to conduct individual interviews with eight participants was made to provide a thick, rich description of how micropolitics affect the actions of administrative leadership teams and how these actions are perceived by teachers. Interviewing participants holding similar positions enhanced trustworthiness and reliability through integration of sampling adequacy.

### **Sampled Schools**

Three middle schools from a large, urban/suburban district located in South Central Texas participated in this study. The unique relationship that each of these schools have with their community is shaped by the expectations of parents, mandates set by local, state, and federal government, and the local policy established by the district, and are an example of how loosely-coupled organizations utilize localized control (Glassman 1973, March & Olsen 1975, Meyer

and Rowan, 1977). To establish a meaningful context in which to compare schools, I will present a brief description of each school and STAAR performance.

School A is a Title I campus serving a predominantly Hispanic population. Surrounded by an older residential neighborhood there is a city park directly across the street from the school. The majority of the teaching staff is Hispanic, with a White female principal. The remaining members of the administrative leadership team include a Hispanic male vice principal, a Hispanic female assistant principal, a Hispanic female administrative intern, and an African American female academic dean.

The demographics for School A show that the student population was stable over the term of the study. The variance of less than 1% in the three -year period studied suggests that data for the cohort is reliable.

Table 1: School A Demographics

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| Year | Eco Dis | AA   | Hispanic | White | AI   | Asian | PI   | 2 or More |
|------|---------|------|----------|-------|------|-------|------|-----------|
| 016  | 65.1%   | 6.1% | 79.1%    | 11.7% | 0.0% | 1.1%  | 0.1% | 1.9%      |
| 2015 | 65.1%   | 5.6% | 79.2%    | 11.8% | 0.1% | 0.8%  | 0.2% | 2.3%      |
| 2014 | 66.5%   | 5.8% | 79.4%    | 11.1% | 0.1% | 1.0%  | 0.0% | 2.6%      |

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Tea.texas.gov. (2017). *Texas Academic Performance Reports*. [online] Available at: <https://tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/index.html> [Accessed 14 Mar. 2017].

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School B is a Title I school serving a predominantly Hispanic student population. Opened in 1960, the school is located in a neighborhood of modest single family homes, government subsidized housing, apartments, retail stores, and light industry. Approximately half of the teachers on this campus are Hispanic with a female Hispanic principal. The remainder of the

leadership team include a female Hispanic vice principal, a male Hispanic assistant principal, a female Hispanic administrative intern, and a White female academic dean.

There is a greater degree of variation in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at School B with an 11.7% difference between 2015 and 2016. There is also a 2.3% variation in the percentage of African American students that is balanced by a 2.2% reduction of Hispanic students. These variations may have an impact on the reliability of the cohort data over time.

Table 2 School B Demographics

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| Year | Eco Dis | AA   | Hispanic | White | AI   | Asian | PI   | 2 or More |
|------|---------|------|----------|-------|------|-------|------|-----------|
| 2016 | 79.0%   | 8.2% | 80.6%    | 8.1%  | 0.1% | 1.4%  | 0.5% | 1.1%      |
| 2015 | 67.3%   | 7.3% | 82.2%    | 7.7%  | 0.0% | 1.2%  | 0.4% | 1.2%      |
| 2014 | 74.4%   | 5.9% | 82.8%    | 8.5%  | 0.1% | 1.3%  | 0.3% | 1.3%      |

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Tea.texas.gov. (2017). *Texas Academic Performance Reports*. [online] Available at: <https://tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/index.html> [Accessed 14 Mar. 2017].

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School C is a non-title school serving a predominantly Hispanic student population. Opened in 1998, the school is located in a diverse neighborhood where students come from low income housing to multi-million dollar mansions. Teachers are predominantly White, with an all-White leadership team of a male principal, a male vice principal, a female assistant principal, and a female academic dean.

The student demographics at School C show that while the percentage of economically disadvantaged students remains relatively flat, there was a reduction in the percentage of White students over the three-year period balanced by an increase of African American, Hispanic, and

Asian students. While there is some minimal variation in student demographics, the reliability of the cohort data should high.

Table 3 School C Demographics

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| Year | Eco Dis | AA   | Hispanic | White | AI   | Asian | PI   | 2 or More |
|------|---------|------|----------|-------|------|-------|------|-----------|
| 2016 | 31.0%   | 6.4% | 55.3%    | 30.9% | 0.0% | 5.0%  | 0.1% | 2.3%      |
| 2015 | 31.0%   | 5.5% | 55.0%    | 32.2% | 0.2% | 4.2%  | 0.1% | 2.9%      |
| 2014 | 32.3%   | 5.8% | 54.1%    | 31.9% | 0.2% | 4.2%  | 0.0% | 3.1%      |

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Tea.texas.gov. (2017). *Texas Academic Performance Reports*. [online] Available at: <https://tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/index.html> [Accessed 14 Mar. 2017].

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## Participants

Seventeen of the twenty-four individuals invited chose to participate in the study. The principal at School A is a White female with more than 20 years as a school administrator. The vice principal is a Hispanic male with seven years as an administrator, and the assistant principal, a Hispanic female, has three years of administrative experience. One department coordinator, a White female with more than twenty years of classroom experience, participated as well.

Participants from School B included a Hispanic female principal with ten years of administrative experience, the vice principal, a Hispanic female with seven years of administrative experience, and a White female academic dean with eight years of experience as an administrator. Two department coordinators participated: A Hispanic male with twelve years of experience, and a Hispanic female with seven years of experience.

All invited from School C chose to participate. The principal is a White male with twenty years of administrative experiences, the vice principal is a White male with nine years as an administrator, the assistant principal is a White female with prior experience as a principal in another district, and a White female academic dean.

All four department coordinators participated in the study as well. Two are Hispanic females with eight to twelve years teaching experiences, one a White female with eighteen years teaching experiences, and one White male with eleven years in the classroom.

### **Data Collection**

Multiple methods were used to collect data and included the analysis of artifacts and interviews.

Individual interviews are the most widely used method of data collection in qualitative research, and the preferred technique for the study of social phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). Individual interviews were the primary data collection method in this study because personal interviews allowed me to interact with the participants as they told their story. Participants were asked a similar set of questions and their responses were audio recorded to ensure accuracy during transcription.

The choice of a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol was made so participant's had a greater flexibility to share their views, and provide in-depth understanding of their perceptions. The deeper understanding derived from these interviews improves reliability because semi-structured interviews allow "more participant voice" and "a richer picture of a phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239). Participants were encouraged to make their responses personal by sharing stories and adding their individual perceptions of what was happening on the campus.

## **Interview Questions**

The intent of the study is to understand the effect that micropolitics within administrative leadership teams have on the campus decision making process, and the impact that these decisions have on student achievement, and the climate and culture of the school. Willner (2011) advocates that qualitative interviews associated with the study of micropolitics be focused on process, routine, and personal perceptions about the organization being studied, with interviews as open-ended as possible to allow the individuals being interviewed the opportunity to develop and communicate their own personal story.

Participants responded to five open-ended questions designed to seek to understand how micropolitics impact their school. Prior to the interview, a brief definition was given for the term micropolitics. The first question asked what effects micropolitics have on the ability of leadership teams to make decisions. Follow up questions explored how communication, leadership style, power, and conflict play a role in team dynamics. The second question explored the effect that decisions have on the confidence teachers have in the administrative leadership team. Follow up questions explored how goals are communicated to staff, perceptions of teacher accountability and importance of mutual respect, awareness of power struggles and inconsistency between different administrators. Question three explored how differences of opinion are resolved. Embedded in this question were favoritism, and power. Confidentiality was the topic of question four. Trust, level of comfort in discussing sensitive topics, and effects of inappropriate sharing of confidential information were explored.

Question five explored the perceptions of participants about the effectiveness of the leadership team to address the needs of students. The following questions were asked of each participant and listed in the order asked:

- 1) How do micropolitics between members of the administrative leadership teams affect their ability to function as a collaborative, decision-making group, and support goals outlined in the school improvement plan?
- 2) Do the decisions made by the administrative leadership teams instill in department coordinators the confidence that their actions are made in the best interests of students??
- 3) Is there a process for resolving differences of opinion? What happens when differences are not resolved?
- 4) Do administrative leadership team members uphold or betray the confidential relationship regarding discussions and opinions expressed during closed meetings of the administrative leadership team?
- 5) What is the perception of the ability of the administrative leadership team to function in the best interest of the students by reducing the number of disciplinary incidents, lowering the classroom failure rate, and raising student achievement as measured by STAAR assessments?

These questions provided the seed for participants to share their individual perceptions of their experiences with interactions that occurred on campus. Follow up questions drilled down exploring the unique experiences that each shared, and were individually crafted for each individual.

### **Field Notes**

Yin (2012) suggests that field notes and reflexive journals be kept during the study. Since each campus was visited multiple times at different times of day, these field notes were taken to record impressions and perceptions that the researcher had of each visit. As a practicing



administrator and a member of an administrative leadership team on another campus, a reflexive journal helped to identify similarities and differences of each campus studied with mine.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis is a process that needs to be reduced to manageable pieces that can be compared and analyzed. Once this is accomplished, data can then be presented in an organized fashion so that themes and trends can be identified. From this, the researcher can draw conclusions, make generalizations, and verify results.

Coding and thematic development of interview data is the first step in data analysis. According to Boyatzis (1983), the process of coding is achieved in five steps. First there is the process of reducing the information, achieved by reading and listening to responses to interview questions, and drafting a synopsis or outline. Theme identification follows and involves comparison of the synopsis or outline within identified subsamples to look for, and identify similarities or patterns. Themes are then compared between groups and across the sampled populations to determine if there are common similarities. These themes are then used to create a code that “captures the richness of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31.). The researcher must take care to minimize “intellectual interference” that might lead to the premature interpretation of the data. Coding allows the researcher to be able to maximize differentiation of data in an easily applicable manner, and reduces the possibility of excluding essential evidence that may change the analysis. Finally, the reliability or consistency of how codes are applied and interpreted is strengthened by having another person work independently to apply the same codes in their analysis of the interview data, providing interrater reliability (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31 – 49).

Codes and themes were developed after a careful analysis of participant responses that included multiple listening of recordings of interview data, word for word transcription of interviews, and the mapping of response similarities and differences.

The STAAR assessment was chosen to make the comparisons between the three schools and determine trends in their academic achievement. Administered annually to all public schools in Texas, individual campus, district, and state average scores are published and are public record. Using the two School Success Initiative areas of reading and math, each school was compared to the state average over a three-year period following the studied cohort of students from sixth to eighth grade.

Another source of data was the school improvement plan. The school improvement plan is a strategic tool designed to drive instruction. Beginning with a “systematic method for determining needs and examining their nature and causes” (DOE, 2001), the comprehensive needs assessment is the foundation for the determination of campus actions necessary to improve student achievement.

A school improvement plan is a “road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the level of student achievement, and shows how and when these changes will be made” (Hanover Research, 2014). Each school participating in the study have their own unique school improvement plan written to meet specific needs of students, school, and community.

The focus of the school improvement plan is student learning. Areas addressed are school climate and culture, curriculum and instruction, leadership, family and community engagement, professional development, and assessment of student achievement to set rigorous, attainable campus goals (Hanover Research, 2014).

### **School A**

The school improvement plan was written by the department coordinators and shared back with the staff. A living document and subject to ongoing review, changes can be made at any time as needed. The school improvement plan calls for collaborative decisions making and looking at different ways of providing support for the school improvement plan.

The vision is to provide high level learning opportunities for every student in a culture rooted in respect, honesty, and mutual accountability. Teachers and administrators strive to make a positive impact in students and building strong connections with the community.

### **School B**

The primary goal of the school improvement plan is to provide every student a safe and supportive learning environment. According to the academic dean, the school improvement plan was written after soliciting qualitative feedback from each teacher in each department. The leadership team took this information, analyzed the data, and made decisions to move the school forward.

In spite of the use of ISS as the default consequence for misbehavior, School B is seen as warm and inviting place by students, teachers and parents. The community is supportive and teachers support one another, design engaging lessons, and working as a team to meet the needs of students. A learner-driven school, School B offers students the opportunity to actively participate in their education.

### **School C**

While the campus consistently scores well above the state average on STAAR assessments, the school struggles to meet the needs of special needs students, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners

The school improvement plan at School C is driven by choice and meaningful relationships. Teachers, aware of campus goals, strive to do what they can to meet them. Prior to making a final decision, all voices are heard, but the decision may not result in what they want.

### **Impact of STAAR Data**

Texas formally evaluates school performance by STAAR assessments, and schools in the district are held responsible for meeting higher district standards. Prior to the beginning of each school year, a formal review of assessment data is shared with central office administration, campus administration, and campus instructional leaders. Data is disaggregated by state, district, campus, and sub-population in each area tested by STAAR. The campus evaluation is based on actual performance compared to projected performance using a regression based socio-economic data as the discriminating variable.

The analysis of STAAR data was made by recording the results of the campus cohort over a three-year period and comparing them with the state average each year. Assuming the population remained somewhat consistent, campus performance was used to identify trends in academic achievement.

### **Data Management**

Hays and Singh (2012) propose that all data be converted to an electronic format. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher with the aid of audio recordings and additional artifacts downloaded from official web sites. Participant confidentiality was improved by assigning computer generated identifiers that were stored at different locations. All electronic data was saved using a password protected program (Hays & Singh, 2012, pp. 316 – 317.).

The choice of organizing data using a role ordered case display protocol was made by the researcher because the analysis performed and comparisons made were driven by participant role

(Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 321.). Two types of analysis were performed. The first was to learn how perceptions of micropolitical conversations effect school culture, climate, and student success. A comparison of demographic data, discipline data, and performance on the STAAR assessment was then made to determine the effectiveness of school leadership.

### **Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Triangulation was accomplished by employing multiple sources of data to enhance the descriptive richness of the phenomenon studied, thereby improving validity (Hays & Singh, 2012, Schwandt, 2007). Triangulation was enhanced by employing multiple sources of evidence: personal interviews, an analysis of STAAR results, and school demographics. Yin (2014) observed that multiple sources of information allow the researcher to establish “converging lines of inquiry” since using multiple sources may suggest similar outcomes (Yin, 2014, p. 120).

Lincoln and Gruba (1985) cite four components of trustworthiness. Credibility refers to the degree of accuracy of the participant’s perceptions and how they are represented. Transferability is the establishment of the ability of the findings to be generalized to similar situations. The research is dependable if well thought out, can be easily replicated, and is well documented. Finally, confirmability is the evidence that there are direct links between the data and the way that it is presented. To increase trustworthiness, each participant was asked similar questions during the interview process without prior knowledge of the content in order to eliminate the possibility of false or misleading responses. Individuals holding similar roles in each school were asked the same questions, and data was analyzed after participants reviewed their responses for accuracy.

I made a conscious effort to apply the principles of trustworthiness as identified by Lincoln and Gruba (1985) to improve my ability to reduce, as much as possible, bias, and present accurate findings that lend themselves to generalization.

Member checking is another method that helps to increase the accuracy and intent of interview data for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Gruba, 1985). Participants were sent transcriptions of their interview via email, and asked to review their individual transcript for accuracy. Participants were encouraged to make any necessary corrections, and expand their answers in order to clarify responses that could be conceived as ambiguous. Participants were encouraged to address any areas that they believed were not accurately described, and to share their perceptions about the interview process, problems experienced, and how I could improve my research (Hays & Singh, 2012, pp. 260 – 261).

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is a practicing vice-principal working in a middle school similar to those being studied. He faces the same issues and problems and appreciates the efforts of his colleagues.

### **Summary**

A qualitatively designed exploratory case study was chosen to study the impact of micropolitical conversations on administrative leadership teams, the decision making process, and the perceptions held by teacher leaders about the effectiveness of the administrative leadership team, and impacts that micropolitics have on culture, climate, teacher efficacy, and student success.

Chapter four will present the findings of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study. I hypothesized that administrative teams that engage in collaborative efforts, maintain a high degree of professionalism, and resolve internal conflict through collaborative negotiation will communicate a more stable and targeted set of expectations to teachers that will result in higher academic performance (Christensen, 1993). Administrative teams that engage in frequent power struggles or allow individuals to express favoritism will send a dysfunctional message to teachers, resulting in lower academic achievement (Stiles, P., Gratton, L., Truss, C., Hope-Hailey, V., & McGovern, P., 1997).

The chapter is organized into three sections. The first section is a summary of the methodology. The purpose, rationale and thematic development are discussed in this section.

Section two is an overview of the results of interviews including thematic development. Responses are by participant role: junior administrator, teacher, and principal, with anecdotal comments provided by the researcher.

The last section is a discussion of the findings. The discussion will begin with an analysis of leadership style, concluding with the effects on campus relationships, culture, climate, and student performance.

#### **Summary of Methods**

Interviews were conducted between October 2016 and January 2017. A total of seventeen participants from three middle schools shared their experiences and perceptions related to how power and influence affected the professional relationships between administrators, their relationships with teachers, the quality of campus culture and climate, and the resulting student achievement. The purpose was to learn how micropolitics shape exchanges and interactions

between members of the administrative leadership team as they make decisions that impact the campus, the perceptions of teachers, and how power and influence are used to achieve desired goals.

Questions and emerging themes are presented in Table 4. Interview data collected from the five basic questions about relationships in the administrative leadership team, the confidence that teachers have in the administration, how conflict is resolved, confidentiality, and the ability of administration to meet the needs of students by providing appropriate support to teachers generated seven overall themes describing the micropolitical environment on each campus.



Table 4 Interview Questions and Themes

| Interview Question   | Theme   |
|--|---|
| <p>How do micropolitics between members of administrative leadership team affect their ability to function as a collaborative decision-making group, and support the goals outlined in the school improvement plan?</p>  | <p>1. The leadership style of the principal sets the tone for formal micropolitical conversations on the campus.</p>  |
| <p>Do the decisions made by the administrative leadership teams instill in department coordinators the confidence that their actions are made in the best interests of students?</p>   | <p>2. Decisions made by the leadership influence the level of confidence that teachers have in the administration.</p> <p>3. The perception that favoritism exists on campus is common.</p> |
| <p>Is there a process for resolving differences of opinion? What happens when differences are not resolved?</p>  | <p>4. The ability of the administrative leadership team to negotiate and resolve conflict is reliant on the leadership style of the principal.</p>  |
| <p>Do administrative leadership team members uphold or betray the confidential relationship regarding discussions and opinions expressed closed meetings of the administrative leadership team?</p>  | <p>5. Confidentiality enhances trust and the shared power of the administrative leadership team.</p>  |
| <p>What is the perception of the ability of the administrative leadership team to function in the best interest of the students by reducing the number of disciplinary incidents, lowering the classroom failure rate, and raising student achievement as measured by STAAR assessments?</p> | <p>6. Student discipline is inconsistent between administrators on campus.</p> <p>7. Decisions made by the administrative leadership team shape the culture and climate of the school.</p>  |

## Results

The assumption was made that the function of campus leadership is defined by the principal. The principal establishes the organizational structure of the school based on their individual leadership style (Ball, 1987), and establishes the ground rules for interactions and exchanges within the administrative leadership team (Crow, Hausman, & Scribner, 2002). This organizational structure defines who has power, how decisions are made, and how they are implemented on campus.

**The leadership style of the principal sets the tone for formal micropolitical conversations on the campus.** The principal, recognized as the formal leader of the school, is responsible for the academic performance of students, the establishment and maintenance of student discipline, and the hiring and evaluation of teachers. At the principal's discretion, junior administrators are granted the authority to act on behalf of the principal (Cooley, & Shen, 2003). The decision of how power and authority are distributed is influenced by the preferred leadership style of the principal.

The principal at School A exhibits the characteristics of a managerial principal. Ball (1987) characterized managerial principals as functional, making decisions using formal hierarchical structures, and expecting junior administrators and teachers to comply with directives. Members of the administrative leadership team have well-defined roles, and are held accountable for their assigned responsibilities. A junior administrator shared his perception of the effect that leadership style of the principal has on their administrative leadership team:

The relationship is top down, and what I mean by that is it's almost as if it's dictatorial. She listens, but she will remind me that the ideas that I may present, if they don't, if she doesn't agree with them, then I can do that when I get my own school.

Another administrator on the campus echoed this observation. When asked if there is an established chain of command on the campus, she responded:

There is a definite leader. If the leader decides to spend more time on a specific topic, we do that, but that's usually the leader's decision.

A department coordinator shared a conversation with the principal where the principal commented about the changes that had occurred since she first entered administration:

She made a comment once about how, "Oh things have changed" from when she started in leadership, because it used to be, it was, everything was top down, you told people what they were going to do and how they were going to do it, and if they didn't do it, they were going to have consequences versus now, where everything is more team driven, data driven, um.. more group decision making, and honestly I think she finds that a little stressful sometimes, because the group consensus and discussion does not always go in the direction that I think she would have preferred.

This observation by a teacher leader suggests that the principal prefers the managerial style of leadership in conjunction with a traditional power relationship (Ball, 1987, Dalh, 1957). Clearly the teacher believes that the principal is uncomfortable with the concept of collaborative leadership and struggles with discussions that do not align with her preconceived idea of the direction that they should go.

In light of this observation, it is interesting that the principal considers the administrative leadership team a collaborative group rather than a formal, organizational structure whose responsibility is to implement decisions made by the principal:

The workings of our administrative leadership team is imperative to the school functioning. Coming up with collaborative decisions, making decisions and looking at

different perspectives and different ways of how we can do things, and then coming out as a united front to implement and support our school improvement plan.

Driven by the managerial leadership style of the principal, the organizational structure of the school follows the top-down, “power over others” relationship defined by Coleman & Ferguson (2014) where the principal wields formal authority to make decisions based on position, with an implication that noncompliance may result in punitive consequences (Dahl, 1957). In an interesting twist, the principal views the organization functioning as “power with others” collaborative relationship (Coleman and Ferguson, 2014) where decisions are made after looking at “different perspectives and different ways” of doing things.

The assignment of roles and distribution of authority within the administrative leadership team is different at School B. Employing a collaborative organizational approach, the administrative leadership team invests time in discussing issues and working through differences of opinion to reach a consensus. The vice principal described the relationships between the members of the administrative leadership by observing:

We work together very closely. I think we have an understanding that we work as a family. We recognize, and are very transparent about the fact that we know that we will have some disagreements, but we treat those still respectfully. We agree to disagree, but at the end of the day we always want to put kids first.

Rather than relying on the principal as the sole decision making authority, the school employs an approach where members of the administrative leadership team actively participate in a dialogue in search of effective strategies to solve problems. Frank and open conversations between members of the administrative leadership team are an important part of this process.

The principal shared her philosophy regarding the importance of considering all opinions prior to making decisions:

I'm one that likes to communicate at all times, so we're very open. The first thing I tell my admin team each year is, don't forget, my door's always open, you come and tell me whatever's going on. If there's an issue, I always say it's ok to agree to disagree, but don't hold it in. If there's something that you disagree with, say it. You know, just because it may be me, just because I'm saying something, doesn't mean you have to agree with me.

With the collaborative leadership style of the principal, the power relationship closely resembles the "power with others" model where administrators work together as equals to solve problems and consider all options prior to making decisions (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014). With the emphasis on collaboration and teamwork, traditional power relationship and struggles as defined by Dahl (1957) are minimal.

The organizational structure at School C reflects the empowerment leadership style of the principal with the establishment of individual relationships with each teacher and administrator. This perception was confirmed by the vice principal when asked about the principal's expectation to share information:

It's not a given that we have to share things with the principal, but it's one of those things where his open door policy allows us to come, and we want to share, and we share it with each other as well.

The academic dean illustrated how individual relationships between members of the administrative leadership team impact their ability to perform their duties:

I would say between the four administrators I feel like our communication is excellent. We're very distinct personalities so it could go south, but it doesn't. We don't have to agree with each other and many times we don't, but we have a respect that I think is underlying among the four of us. I think that we work collaboratively. We have different jobs, different aspects of our jobs that don't overlap, and then there some parts of the job that do overlap.

Sharing his personal philosophy of leadership, the principal emphasized how sharing responsibilities with individuals can impact the school:

One of those things is that notion of shared leadership. The more you have shared vision, in my opinion, the more global those conversations become, but at a specific level, the more problem solving authority has been given horizontally. I've got to know you on a personal level first before I can kind of know what makes you tick and really fully support you, and so I spent a lot of time learning about each employee from a personal standpoint.

A teacher working on her administrative certificate summarized this leadership by saying:

I think our team works very well together. I don't think there's any animosity or any power struggles within that. I think the principal does a really good job of saying we're all equal in a sense, and that you guys are the ones the really run the ship. I'm just here to facilitate anything that needs to be done from the principal prospective.

By establishing independent relationships with each member of the faculty, the empowering principal establishes an environment that resembles Coleman and Ferguson's (2014) "power apart from others" model, where teachers and administrators are granted freedom of

determination through shared responsibility (Short & Greer, 1997) taking risks that they believe are appropriate and acceptable as they work to attain their goal.

**Decisions made by the leadership team influence the level of confidence that teachers have in the administration.** Regardless of how decisions are made, the administrative leadership team has the responsibility to ensure that all decisions are implemented with fidelity. No matter how sound a decision may be, there will be teachers who will challenge decisions and question why they weren't consulted prior to finalization. When teacher opinion and input are considered, the collaborative efforts of teachers are recognized adding strength to the decision. Teachers may not agree with every decision, but it is important that they are given the opportunity to contribute (Dufour, 2009).

Mutual trust and confidence are enhanced when the administration values the input and ideas of teachers when making decisions and are harmed when the organizational structure of the school is used to control teachers (Hays & Ross, 1989).

An administrator at School A shared her philosophy regarding the importance of teacher input in the decision making process:

I see the importance of doing the bottom up scenario. We allow teachers to collaborate. We have our faculty advisory council, we have our instructional leadership team, we have PBIS teams that work with discipline, and then they bring their ideas to admin, and then admin takes it to the student, the teacher body. No, not everything is liked by all teachers, but when I go back and say look, this is made by teachers, and I understand that you're not comfortable with it, let's talk about it, but understand that this isn't something I came up with.

The priority of the decision making process is to meet the needs of students as identified in the school improvement plan. The school improvement plan is a living document that combines an analysis of student need with proposed strategies designed to improve student achievement, and is the blueprint that drives the decision making process. The principal emphasized the importance of teacher input into the development of the school improvement plan:

Student needs drive where we are, where staff are. I think our teachers are real aware of what our priorities are. First of all, they built the school improvement plan. It was built by our teacher leaders, and they shared it back with the staff. They review it on an ongoing basis and make changes as needed.

When asked if teachers had confidence in the decisions that the administrative leadership team made, a junior administrator shared:

Yes, and we meet, the coordinators meet once a week, all the coordinators have a common planning period, and so they have that instructional leadership team meeting every Monday. And when we (the administrative leadership team) have a discussion about something, that topic is brought to that instructional leadership team to make the decision on whether to go forward with something, or whether to tweak something, or whether they think it's a problem. I would say that our coordinators, they help us with the master schedule. We say this is how many teachers the district has given us, and these are how many sections that we need. Start putting stuff together. We rely on them quite a bit, actually.

Sometimes the instructional leadership team presents ideas that the principal might not necessarily agree with or believe is appropriate. A teacher explained how the process works and



her perception of what happens when the principal is presented with an idea that she's not comfortable with:

Usually we just talk it through, and basically because it is that group decision making process, it's basically the group consensus will rule. I know there've been a couple of times that we have, that the group has decided to do things differently than the principal has proposed, and we do it that way because that's how it was decided by the team, but you can see in her face, she's not happy.

As a managerial leader, the principal is most comfortable with the traditional role of implementing educational programs designed to meet the needs of students (Hallinger, 1992) developing a strong campus culture through focused professional development experiences (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000). She is masterful at accomplishing tasks that enhance trust by the school community: clearly communicate a positive vision, manage resources effectively and efficiently, model professional behavior, and successfully implement systems to improve the academic performance of student (Tschannen-Moran 2014). While teachers are comfortable placing professional trust in the principal, they are reluctant to engage the principal in casual conversation, due in part to the perception that she prefers to maintain a professional separation.

When making decisions at School B, it is the process and the effect that process has on campus culture and climate that is considered most important. Decisions are considered an outcome of process, and as teachers begin to see positive changes and improvements on campus, they begin to support administrative effort.

The vice principal shared her perception of the importance of process and change in relation to achieving desired results:

I think they're comfortable with what's going on, but it's still a process. And so we're not exactly where I want us to be, and that's ok, because we're growing. I'm hoping that the message that they're getting is in the results that they're going to start seeing. I always like to tell them the definition of insanity is doing the same thing but expecting different results. I'm hoping the results will foster the changes we implemented here – and not necessarily on the huge, huge scale, but even a small amount of growth for our teachers to see that their efforts are going recognized, and to see the students are benefiting from that.

For the process to be effective, there must be multiple sources of thoughts and ideas from teachers, not only to gain the information and data necessary to make meaningful decisions, but also to give teachers a sense of ownership. Every teacher is encouraged to offer ideas and opinions during grade level and department meetings, and these ideas and opinions are discussed by the administrative leadership team prior to making decisions. The academic dean shared the process used to elicit feedback for consideration from teachers on the campus:

We have qualitative feedback from every single department so every single teacher has a voice in it. Then our leadership team takes that, and then we kind of mold it into, ok, well, here's our data, here's what everybody thinks, here's how everybody feels, all the information back from parents, now what can we do to move forward? So, because of that process, that's why I feel like everybody's on the same page, because everybody had a say in it.

A department leader described his perception of the process used in decision making stating that teachers are afforded a voice prior to the finalization of decision. Understanding that their ideas and opinions might not influence the final decision, teachers feel that they are being

listened to, and recognize that decisions made by the administrative leadership team are made in the best interest of students:

I mean we definitely feel like decisions are made with our voice and our input. Of course, there's decisions that are made and our voice is taken into consideration, but unfortunately, some decisions have to be made a certain way because it's for the better good of the students, and that's the ultimate goal. I think that teachers will ultimately, always keep that in mind.

The solicitation of teachers' ideas and opinions is just as important at School C, but because of the nature of individual relationships that have been established on the campus, at times it is difficult for teachers to see the impact of their ideas on students:

I'm finding that out that you can't please everybody, and so, honestly, unfortunately about 75% of the time, teachers do not necessarily interpret or process the decision and why it was made. I will say that whenever we've had to make a big decision, there's been surveys, so it's not like everybody's voice was not heard, it just may very well be that's it not the result that they wanted.

The empowerment of individuals rather than a collaborative team or departments has resulted in instructional decisions left to the discretion of the individual teacher.

We are all very aware of our goals and we're all doing everything to support those goals. All of mine (relationships with administrative leadership) are very positive. I believe in very strong relationships between teachers, administration, and of course right down to my students as well. But I don't believe in just building those relationships - it's an atmosphere of respect, it's trust. This administration personally trusts me to do things in my classroom that other administrators would go "what is she doing" because I do things

different. And different is ok here, and that has been supported, and its kind of filtered out a little into my department where other people are trying new things, and it's supported. Anything that we want to do, whether it's technology, non-technology, it doesn't matter. If it's different – 100% on board, they say “try it” because it's a whole mindset. You don't know if you're going to be able to do it until you try, and if you fail, who cares?

The way the decisions are reached vary from campus to campus. Input and feedback from multiple sources provide the necessary information required to make decisions that are relevant to the campus. When teachers see that their ideas are valued by the administration and are considered before decisions are made, confidence in the team is solidified.

When a decision is made, it has an impact on the culture and climate of the school. When teachers experience the satisfaction and feeling of being included as an active participant in the process of making decisions, the impact is more powerful. The importance of process in the school can be more important than the outcome of a decision (Meyer & Rowen, 1977).

**The perception that favoritism exists on campus is common.** Favoritism, the perception that a small, favored group of teachers have more influence on the principal than others, creates an environment of mistrust and resentment. As an “arena of struggle” (Ball, 1987, Blasé, 1991), relationships and interactions must operate within a context of “give and take” (Kelly & Thibaut, 1979) that can be misinterpreted as favoring one over another. An administrator at School A believes that teachers who serve on campus committees, organizations, or perform extra duties that increase their exposure to the administration can be seen as favorites:

There's a couple of people who volunteer to do a whole lot, and they're on two or three different committees, as opposed to other people being on zero committees, and so

maybe they have more influence in that sense, but it's not because they have somebody's ear or somebody likes them more. I think it's because they're willing to go the extra mile.

When an administrator works to develop relationships with teachers and takes the time to listen to their concerns, it can be argued that there is a case of reverse favoritism. Another administrator at Campus B shared third experience when asked if there is a preferred administrator that teachers go to:

For the most part my two and a half years there, or so, I've managed to develop a lot of relationships with the teachers, and those are just positive relationships, and so they know I have an open door policy, my door is never closed, and so they know they can walk in at any time, and they know they can get chocolate. I have a box of chocolate there, and so they come in for the chocolate and then they talk to me. Does that mean that maybe they prefer talking to me?

Sometimes in a "give and take" relationship the willingness by an administrator to be available to listen to the concerns of teachers and demonstrate a genuine concern for others can contribute to the perception of favoritism. A teacher on the same campus shared her observations about why teachers prefer to go to this particular administrator over others on campus:

I think, honestly I think he is most highly respected among our administrative team, partly for his years of experience, and partly because he really will, he will make time, even if it's you know, seven in the morning when he first gets to school. If a teacher is willing to get there that early, he will take time to sit and talk to them, and hear them out, or he'll try to stay late and talk with them and hear what they're worried about, because I think he's genuinely concerned about the staff as individuals because he knows if they're healthy in their mind and heart, if they're functioning at a better level, they're going to

teach better. And so if that takes a thirty-minute conversation to let them get something off their chest, to share something they're worried about, then he's willing to give that time, because it benefits the teacher and ultimately benefits the students.

The perception at School A is that there are teachers who demonstrate their preference for an administrator has not gone unnoticed by the principal, and may be a source of tension between the administrator and the principal (Khatri, Tsang, & Begley, 2006). When asked how this preference affected the professional relationship between them, the administrator shared this exchange that he had with the principal:

She can't stand it. She's actually told me, um, she's actually told me that I spend too much time with the teachers, and I said, what do you, I don't understand. I said I'm um, um, she said something to the effect that, you know, you're, you're spending too much time with them instead of getting the work that you need done. And I said, well, but I thought that we're here to support our teachers, are you saying I'm not supposed to have relationships with the teachers? And she said, well no, but I need you to focus on why you're here.

The perception of an imbalance of the give and take relationship can lead to the impression of favoritism (Kelly & Thibaut, 1979). This imbalance is not restricted to the perception that the administration has favorite teachers, but can extend to teachers having a favorite administrator. Whether favoritism is founded in fact or not, it the perception of the favoring one over the other that is problematic.

Recognizing that teachers who volunteer and become more involved than others are often viewed as favorites, the academic dean at school B observed:

I think the ones who are more willing to step out on a limb and take a risk, and initiate, and become involved, and those who are more go getters. Yeah, a little bit.

If teachers are held to the same standard of accountability, the perception of favoritism can be lessened, even when teachers have unique needs and circumstances. A teacher at School B offered this opinion:

I think all teachers are held accountable, and there's obviously a protocol that everybody is held accountable for, and we're, you know, and that can be campus wide, but obviously there's certain situations where that teachers have different classrooms, have different types of students, have different situations that, there are different needs and ways of growing that other teachers don't. Not that their needs, and how they're supported by administration, by the administrative leadership team

Perception of favoritism in empowerment oriented schools can be exacerbated by the misinterpretation of the quality of the relationship between the principal and the teacher when differential leader-member exchanges are perceived as unequal (Cobb & Lau, 2015). Complex principal teacher relationships where there is an investment of time and accompanying benefits are seen as examples of favoritism while formalized relationships are not. A closely related are situation occurs when an administrator and a teacher are personal friends, have common interests outside of the school, or socialize with one another (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai 2004). The vice principal at School C expressed his views this way:

I think that maybe some teachers may feel that way just because certain, you know, it's in life, certain people click more than others. Teachers may see that and perceive that as, "Oh, they just got favoritism" when they're really not. You're just clicking about certain interests.

Certainly misperceptions of individual relationships are a frequent source of the perception of favoritism:

I think it all comes down to relationships. Honestly you know, and how each person perceives other people. I think if you feel more comfortable discussing things with a person, you're more apt to go to them, and I think it can be perceived, because of the willingness to go to somebody, that it's perceived as favoritism. I will say with our current administration I have not heard those conversations as far as favoritism is concerned.

Sometimes favoritism is real (Simon, Smithburg & Thompson, 1950). An experienced teacher cited the example of the former principal cultivating an environment where social relationships influenced her professional decision making capability, resulting in a privileged inner circle of influence:

Prior to our current principal's arrival and when I first got to campus, the click was called the champagne club (laughter), and what I noticed from that you have to be really, really careful with your socialization. The former principal was friends with certain teachers, a group of teachers, and it just seemed like, they're likable for the most part, but it was perceived that that was like the inner circle. Having our current principal now for three years, it's not the same situation at all. I'm sure probably in somebody's mind they think that there is some kind of click or situation, but for me, as a teacher, I don't see it.

Favoritism is a condition found on every campus, and depending upon the severity, can irreparably damage the campus climate (Greenfield, 1985). Targets of alleged favoritism, teachers who volunteer to serve on campus committees, or work closely with the principal on



their administrative certification will inevitably be identified as “favorites” regardless of their intent, professional relationships, and demeanor.

When one administrator is preferred over others, the ability of the administrative leadership team to function can suffer because the other administrators may lose trust in that individual, or believe that their confidences won't be upheld, affecting the team's ability to discuss serious and confidential topics.

**The ability of the administrative leadership team to negotiate and resolve conflict is reliant on the leadership style of the principal.** Conflict is inevitable within any group of people who work together to solve complex problems and the ability to negotiate and reach consensus is an important skill (Nyhan, 2000, Carnevale, 1995, p. 131). Sources of conflict within administrative leadership teams include differences of opinion, educational background, ethnicity, socio-economic status, morals, values, and personality (Ghaffar, 2009, Druckman, & Zechmeister, 1973). While conflict can be seen as a detriment to the success of the team, if managed properly, it can provide members of the administrative leadership the opportunity for learning and professional growth through the negotiation process.

In administrative leadership teams, the principal sets the tone, defines relationships, allocates power, assigns roles, and drives how conflicts are resolved (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004). If the leadership style of the principal is managerial, negotiation may be unlikely, especially if the principal is used to making unilateral decisions (Christensen, 1993). The assistant principal at School A shared her observations how the principal controls conflict by making executive decisions:

I have heard, “this is my school, when you get a school you can do it your way.” I think that the conflict is sometimes heard, but not necessarily listened to very well.

The vice principal elaborated by sharing his experience in attempting to interject differing views:

When it comes down to your original question of what happens when there is a disagreement, we ultimately just succumb to the fact that she's the boss. She has ultimately told us this is just the way it's going to be; this is my school. It's funny, she says that when she feels like she can't win. There'll be times when I do present an argument, and I don't mean it in a disrespectful way, I would never disrespect the position, of course, so I would present my arguments in a respectful tone and manner, and tell her this is what I'm thinking, and this is why I'm thinking it, and she says this is my school, this is how we do it. At that point I just say yes ma'am, because what else can I say?

The principal at School A holds a different perspective. Rather than recognizing that junior members of her administrative leadership team are experiencing frustration over not being able to express their opinions and feelings freely in team meetings, she believes that members are free to express their views in a safe environment:

Hopefully what we have in our administrative PLC is a safe place to say what you feel, say what you mean. Sometimes that's not always comfortable, sometimes something's said that we talk through a little bit. Sometimes we agree to disagree on some things. I appreciate their perspective being shared, but it may not necessarily be something we can do.

Designed to be a place to collaborate and share ideas, the reality is that a PLC can be a hostile environment to some of its members. As schools become more collaborative, they become more political, with the accompanying struggles by members to become influential,

while PLC's in hierarchically organized schools tend succumb to the desires of the principal (Blasé & Blasé, 1999)

The atmosphere at School B is different. The team has adopted a collaborative approach to problem solving and decision making, and welcome different approaches to issues following the model Cardino (2012) proposed. The vice principal shared her observation:

I think the cool thing about our team is that we don't get our feelings hurt. You know, "Hey, I like that idea, but let's do it this way. I think this way would work better" and so it's nothing personal. It's about making it function and making it successful basically at the end of the day.

The principal at School B believes that relationships on the administrative leadership team are conducive to transparent and open sharing of ideas without fear:

If we threw an idea out there, we came up with a solution, we're going to see how it progressed over whatever time frame, and then we'll come back and say, did that work, or do we need to go back and try, maybe what somebody else suggested. I think my team is comfortable enough to tell me they don't agree with something. I don't think they would ever keep anything where they might be talking about it with someone else.

The dynamics on School C are different. While instances of outright conflict are rare, the way that members of the administrative leadership team respond to conflict is unique. The assistant principal observed:

I think the academic dean and I, the two females, we'll go behind doors and we can vent to each other, and I think the principal and the vice principal vent to each other, but then we just kind of move on. We don't come down to a table as say "so and so is not getting along." We usually just get past it, you know, bouncing ideas. We all get along very

well, but there's those times, when I'm just going to close the door. I'm just going to vent, and we just kind of move forward.

Conflict resolution and negotiation on campus are driven by the leadership style of the principal. With managerial principals there is little negotiation and the expectation is to fall in line behind the principal. Collaborative principals encourage that all disagreements be brought to the table for discussion, with the consensus of the group serving as the determining factor, while empowering principals allow individuals to work out issues on their own (Ball, 1987).

Each technique has its own merits and shortcomings. In managerial schools, the climate of the school may suffer because junior administrators and teachers may become discouraged that their thoughts and ideas seem to be ignored. Collaborative schools, while addressing conflict head-on may become bogged down in the process and unable to focus on critical items. Empowering campuses are left to their own, and there is no assurance that conflict may ever be resolved and may become larger as time passes.

### **Student discipline is inconsistent between administrators on campus.**

Administrative leadership teams are responsible for the development and implementation of a campus wide discipline management system to support a safe school environment where teachers can teach and students can learn. Because each school is unique, discipline management systems can vary greatly from school to school. Administrators and teachers shared their perceptions of how discipline was managed on their campus and how it affects the day to day operation of the school.

The assistant principal at School A shared that there is a specific discipline protocol that teachers must follow in order for them to gain administrative support for the actions that they have taken:

We have a flow chart, of things to do for discipline, and sometimes, which I totally understand, they (teachers) bypass certain steps because they just, they need, they need the child out of the classroom before they lose their mind. I totally get that, but if they don't follow those steps there may be repercussions from certain administrators as to, "Well, you didn't follow these steps" so there's that, you know "the teachers didn't" you know, that sort of thing.

School A follows the philosophical tenets of PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies) that promotes the adoption of interventions that are designed to enhance academic and social interactions for all students on the campus (Sugai, Horner, & Lewis, 2007). Behavioral expectations are clearly communicated, and students receive positive reinforcement for meeting these expectations. Students who struggle receive additional interventions designed to change behavior without overly punitive consequences (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010).

With the implementation of PBIS, conflict between the principal and the vice principal over consequences for misbehavior are common, since traditionally, the vice principal of the school is the disciplinarian (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, Bates & Shank, 1983, Reed & Himmler, 1985). When the principal of the school changes disciplinary policy to meet PBIS guidelines rather than support the more traditional discipline decisions made by the vice principal, frustration occurs. This is especially true when the vice principal believes that in-school suspension is warranted for a student who commits a violation of school rules while the principal insists on an alternative consequence that keeps the student in the classroom. The vice principal shared his observations:

I'm going to be respectful of the decision she makes, not to say there's not times that my frustration shows, especially the way she wants to handle discipline, especially since I see

that particularly being my role as the disciplinarian of the school. When she comes up with a new idea for discipline and I may have a disagreement about it, sometimes I present my frustration to my AP and my AP will understand, but we try to be united about it.

Since PBIS emphasizes positive reinforcement, teachers generally perceive that discipline is too lenient. Engaging in conversations with students about the choices that they make with suggestions on how better choices have more positive results is fine, but teachers believe that there is no substitute for specific, punitive disciplinary consequences:

I think it's a little light handed. I think that they focus too much on if you love a kid enough eventually they'll straighten out. In my mind, if you love a kid enough you set boundaries and limits, and when you cross those boundaries, there are consequences, because life has natural consequences. And a lot of times there's too much, in my mind, too much conferencing with students, consulting with students, you know, trying to talk it out, but they never get an actual consequence, because you can talk it out with a kid and help them understand what they did wrong, you can role play with a kid in how you should have spoken with the teacher, let's practice that, so next time you can handle it better. But for now, you made this bad choice, and there has to be a consequence. I think there's a lot of the talk, talk, talk, but not enough of going back and saying, look, you crossed the line and it's unacceptable.

These perceptions may be driven by a failure to thoroughly communicate expectations to teachers (Turaga 2016), or may be a result of the teacher's reluctance to buy into the philosophy behind PBIS.

This is what ties in with PBMAS (Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System) at the state and federal level. What we're being told as a district that we need to do, to make sure we do not give consequences like in-school suspension or off campus suspension to special education students.

In an effort to keep students in the classroom, School B is transitioning from a campus philosophy where in-school suspension has been the primary consequence for student misbehavior to a more creative approach reducing the time that students are removed from the classroom. The vice principal shared the challenges of changing the teachers' perceptions and beliefs about student discipline:

We're looking at discipline a little differently ... One of the hardest things has been getting staff members to not rely on ISS as always being used. That's been the history on our campus when kids were acting up. ... That was our go to consequence, that was our consequence that required no thinking at all. ... Getting them to understand the implications of pulling that child out, ... of all his or her classes, and how that affects them over the long run. ... that academic gap that we're trying to close is not being, is not going to be closed, because we're removing them. ... So one of the things we're doing now is tackling it through our PLC's, ... and addressing those concerns with them on a PLC small group level. ... if you can't justify why we're pulling a child out of all eight classes, we're not pulling them out. ... we're going to be doing things that are more effective, but we don't want to interrupt their academic setting.

Teachers don't feel supported and question changes to disciplinary policy. The academic dean expressed her observations and appreciation of the changes being made in order to assure that learning is the focal point of the school, even when disciplinary actions are being taken:

They don't feel supported because we have a whole entire process for discipline. It's not just "you drive me crazy, let me send you to the office". Very prescribed in the steps that we need to take with students, and it's all about learning, it's about them learning to fix their behavior because they're fourteen!

Discipline policies at School C, much like those at other schools, are individualized by administrator, and lack consistency. This inconsistency encourages teachers to "shop" for the administrator that, from prior experience, issue consequences to students that they believe to be most severe. One teacher shared her reason for approaching one administrator for disciplinary reasons rather than another:

If it's a discipline issue, I don't come to the principal. I go to my vice principal. I wouldn't take a discipline issue to the assistant principal. That's not her forte. I'm going to be honest. And then so the vice principal, that's who I'd go to.

The current trend is for administration to adopt non-traditional discipline management techniques that reduce the number of days that a student is out of the classroom. Teachers who struggle with these changes, and want to see the student receive a consequence that they believe to be appropriate are increasingly frustrated with administrators. The impact of these alternative disciplinary techniques seem to be effective, improving academic performance since students remain in the classroom and receive instruction.

**Decisions made by the administrative leadership team shape the culture and climate of the school.** The formal evaluation instrument of school success in Texas is the STAAR assessment. Scores are published, sanctions imposed, and schools labeled as successful or not are based on this single "snapshot" assessment. With so much at stake, preparation of students to perform well on STAAR assessments is a significant driver of curriculum and instruction.



While the STAAR is recognized as the formal evaluation of school success, performance on a single standardized test fails to recognize significant indicators of school success that help to define school performance. One measure of school success is the amount of growth and improvement made by students from year to year. Growth and improvement are made possible by the establishment and support of a strong campus culture that focuses on the needs of all students. A strong campus culture is established when administrators and teachers share common beliefs that all students are capable of learning, and every adult on campus will do whatever it takes to help all students accomplish this goal (Heckman, 1993). A positive school climate improves the odds of reaching this goal because when teachers feel that their efforts are appreciated, they are willing to take risks, and work to create a classroom atmosphere that encourages students to engage in meaningful learning experiences (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral, 2009).

This establishment of a positive culture and climate depends upon the ability of the administrative leadership team to communicate high expectations for student achievement coupled with ongoing support for teachers as they work to meet student needs (Thacker and McInerney, 1992). The campus culture and climate is established by the principal of the school, and is a reflection of the priorities that the principal holds regarding the potential students have for academic success.

Progress toward mastery of the standards as demonstrated by student performance is a priority of the principal at School A, and clearly communicated to the teachers by the principal:

I think our staff is very aware that my highest priority is, do students meet, show, how is the student showing mastery of the standard. All year long, how do we work on that, what is mastery of the standard, and I think our teachers are real aware of what our

priorities are. First of all, they built the school improvement plan, it was built by our teacher leaders, and they shared it back with the staff. They review it on an ongoing basis for, and make changes as needed.

Unfortunately, improvement and growth are often difficult to quantify. One example shared was that while the grade book records grades earned for an assignment or test, it fails to consider the amount of growth experienced by a student. The example was given that when students begin a new unit, they often lack prior knowledge, so the grades entered reflect the level of mastery as a failing grade. As students begin to demonstrate mastery, grades improve, but because of averaging, may reflect a failing grade at the conclusion of the unit. The principal shared her frustration:

If you walk in with a zero understanding of a skill, and at the end of the unit you have a hundred percent mastery, what is the grade book average? It's a 50, which is failing!

That kid has made HUGE growth, but our grade book doesn't support that.

To compensate for failure to recognize student growth, the principal implemented a series of programs and interventions designed to more accurately meet the needs of students and assess their mastery. Closing the gap for struggling students has been identified as a priority at School A. The vice principal shared the expectations that has been communicated to the teachers:

It's no joke we've made some improvements over the last two years, we've kept that going. I want you to understand the emphasis is not on, you better be doing your job, she's not grilling them with that. The emphasis is on, what are the interventions for the kids that need the most help.

Documentation of efforts to improve student success and mastery is important, and include the requirement of adherence to a strict grading and documentation protocol that that teachers must follow prior to assessing a student a failing grade. A department coordinator shared:

We have to have three test grades every six weeks to try to make sure there's a balance there of the work load. As long as the teacher can show that ... they got the progress report signed, they have had phone or email communication ... as long as the teacher has done what we've been told to do, maintain those records, keep those notes, notify the parents if there's a concern, then the administration will back us. If they go into CMS and it's blank, and the teacher has not maintained any of their own logs ... then the teacher's not going to be supported.

There is no question that the academic success of School A is a result of the establishment of a strong culture shared by the administration and teachers. While the culture is strong, the climate could be improved. With protocols in place to insure that teachers exhaust every opportunity to improve student growth and success, the vice principal expressed that his belief that the school would experience a higher rate of success if teachers were recognized for their work and commitment:

The teachers feel as long as there is a plan, we're ok. But make no mistake, the teachers are the ones who are driving the machine. They're driving the bus. And what I mean by that is they're the ones doing all the leg work, staying late. They're dedicated. I think we are on the cusp of something great at our school. We are on the cusp of making all these high achievements, but we're right there, we're about to take that step if we could just come together as a family. If we could just make that next step. And the teachers are

doing it. How much further would they go if they knew that you would go give them a hug, and say, thank you? Thank you for doing that. Thank you for staying tonight.

A department coordinator shared her interaction with the principal that illustrates the unsettled climate on the campus. Her perception is that the principal is struggling with changes in leadership expectations and wrestles with the collaborative process:

“Oh, things have changed” from when she started in leadership, because it used to be, it was, everything was top down, you told people what they were going to do and how they were going to do it, and if they didn’t do it, they were going to have consequences versus now, where everything is more team driven, data driven, more group decision making, and honestly I think she finds that a little stressful sometimes, because the group consensus and discussion does not always go in the direction that I think she would have preferred.

Personal relationships with parents and the community are difficult for managerial principals because there is not an organizational structure for dealing with the public. Social interactions can be awkward and difficult, often obvious to the community. The vice principal shared an experience he had earlier in the semester:

If you’re the leader of the school, why aren’t you out there with all the families? Greeting them, saying hi to them, mingling, just being that person that can... and the reason that she can’t is because it’s too much of a personal thing. She can’t, she can’t take that step of being the human with her families. She can’t, I mean. It’s no joke that you and I know each other well, and if I see you I shake your hand, give you a little abrazo or something. I treat the families the same way. I give ‘em a hug, to the moms, the kids, whatever. That doesn’t happen with her, and the families pick up on it. I had families ask,

“Oh where’s the principal?” I said I think she’s in the office, “Well she should be out here, and enjoying all this, it’s a beautiful day, it is a beautiful day, let’s enjoy it.”

The principal at School B holds a similar philosophy regarding the STAAR assessment. The emphasis is on student growth and improvement, and not on STAAR scores. Because the school struggles in this area, she is conscious of her need to be as supportive as possible:

I know that STAAR is a big deal, but I’ve told them for the last five years, I’m not even going to harp on it. I’m not going to tell you why are your scores this low, because I see the hard work that they do all year, and it’s really disheartening when those scores come out, because I know my teachers have worked their butts off to get, to hopefully get good scores, and when they don’t get those good scores, I see it in their face, and I don’t want to be that principal that’s calling them in and saying, hey, “why did y’all get this, why are your kids scoring so low?” I’ve told them every year I’m not going to, as long as I see some little growth in our kiddos, and I see you all in planning, and see you all teaching the way you’re supposed to, I’ll be fine.

This observation shared by the principal emphasizes the importance of both culture and climate on academic performance. There is a shared belief on campus that all students can learn, and efforts are ongoing to support teachers and students to achieve this goal. STAAR results are only one piece of the total picture and are not how the school is defined. The vice principal shared her perceptions of the limited role STAAR assessments plays, how students are continually encouraged to grow, and how assessment is ongoing:

As for as our expectations, obviously we’re looking at more than one test. Because that’s such a huge category and it weighs a lot. Giving them the opportunity, though more specific than the grade, it’s not about the grade, it’s about their learning. Are we giving

them the opportunities to show us, and demonstrate that they have received that information, that they know it, and have the knowledge of that lesson or that particular content? And so that's what our emphasis is here. Because of that a lot of our teachers will do, I mean, extended, extended time with accepting work, come in, come work with me, reteach, come on, and that sort of thing.

Support is tied to the level of trust that teachers have in the administration. A department chairperson at School B shared her perception of administrative support:

Our principal is very supportive of us. If we get something where we're not where we want to be, or we're not where we thought we should be, she's is, just very, don't get discouraged, don't, you know, tell your teachers there are, like look deeper into the data, 'cause there are places where you'll find successes.

Another department coordinator shared his observations on trust and support:

If a student doesn't do well on a test, is it because, well, they don't have mastery of the content, or is it just because they don't test well? You analyze that in the classroom, so I think those types of messages have been sent to us as a professional. I think administration just allows us to make those adjustments and accommodations and has the confidence in the teachers to be able to distinguish that within their classroom just to not make it where our grading policy can sometimes hinder student success over time, just to not make that happen.

The academic dean shared her view regarding how the cultural foundation that drives her campus:

I think the proactive and reactive both together help the teachers realize, it helps them to understand, how important student progress is, because I love that about my principal.

She's not about what that stupid test says at the end of the year. Because I hate that test. I get to work for a principal who's about growth, and I could not ask, I mean as a parent and as a professional, I couldn't ask for anything better. If students are growing throughout the year, and we see that throughout the year, that "autopsy" that we take in May is not that big of a deal at all.

## **Summary**

During the course of the interview process with members of the administrative leadership teams and teacher leaders at the three middle schools studied, seven themes were discovered that related to the micropolitics of the school, and each of the themes identified in this study is dependent upon the principal's ability to communicate effectively. Three themes were directly influenced by the leadership style of the principal: the way decisions are made, the way conflicts are resolved, and the health of the climate and culture of the school. The level of confidence that teachers have in the campus administration, while closely related to the principal's leadership style is a result of the quality of interactions between the members of the administrative leadership team, their ability to maintain confidentiality, and their ability to build trusting relationships with teachers.

The remaining three themes were loosely related to leadership style and appear to be consistent across all three campuses. Each campus experienced a degree of favoritism, had moderate to high levels of confidence that the principal and the administrative leadership team were making decisions in the best interests of students, while participants shared mixed responses regarding instructional expectations, grading policies, the emphasis placed on standardized testing, and the consistency of enforcement of discipline policies.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISUCISION AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will begin with a summary, followed by a discussion of the findings with a brief analysis of the supporting data. Suggestions for ways to improve micropolitical relationships in leadership teams with recommendations for future research will conclude the chapter.

#### **Summary**

The intent was to determine if the quality of micropolitics between the members of the administrative leadership team have an effect on the culture, climate, and student achievement. The assumption was made that positive micropolitics, characterized by collaborative decision making, successful resolution of conflict, effective communication, and the reduction of the perception of favoritism, would improve the confidence that teachers have in the administrative leadership team to make critical decisions, making a positive impact on the culture and climate of the school that would result in improved student achievement as measured by STAAR.

Micropolitical exchanges are conversations where power and influence are used by individuals to achieve desired goals (Blasé, 1981 p.11). Administrators engage in discussions with one another with the intent to present their thoughts and ideas to convince others that their solutions are better than those of their colleagues. Teachers lobby for resources, favors, preferred schedules, and students that they believe to be better than others while trying to convince administration to place undesirable students with another teacher. Students negotiate with teachers for better grades, argue disciplinary actions with administrators, and struggle with the



difficulties that they encounter as they learn socializing skills. Parents question the decisions of teachers, administrators, and their children as they try to make sense of the events that happen at school.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose was to discover if a positive micropolitical environment resulted in positive impacts on the culture, climate, and academic performance of students. To place the results in context, a review of school demographics, an overview of generic campus improvement plans, and an analysis of STAAR data was performed to better understand the campus environments. Administrative leadership team members and department coordinators from each campus were interviewed to learn their perceptions of the micropolitical exchanges they experienced as they interacted with one another to improve student performance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Ball (1987) posited that the leadership style of the principal significantly impacts campus micropolitics. Using a micropolitical lens, this study investigated the relationship between leadership style, organizational structure, and how leadership teams collaborate as they communicate, resolve conflict, and build confidence to avoid perceptions of favoritism. Contingency theory can help us to understand how group performance, task relationships, and power interact to as leader's addresses circumstances over which they have no control. Contingency theory also suggests that task-oriented leaders are better prepared to respond to more challenging environments than relationship-oriented leaders (Fiedler, 1967 p.169). Two other theories prove useful in looking at how contingency explains micropolitical behavior. Role Theory lends insight to how relationships affect interactions between leaders and followers

(Hofmann, Morgeson, & Gerras, 2003), and Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Arif, Zahid, Kashif, & Sindhu, 2010) looks at the way leaders and follower communicate.

## **Discussion**

The discussion of the findings consists of two sections. Section one is a discussion of the mechanics of micropolitics: the effects of leadership, organizational structure, roles in the organization, communication, negotiation, and resolution of conflict in the three schools studied. Section two is a brief analysis of the outcomes that micropolitics have on school culture, climate, and student performance.

The expected result that schools that led by leadership team that engage in positive micropolitics outperform those that do not was not held. At first glance, the assumption might be made that a school led by a traditional authoritative principal might underperform because of limited opportunities for the leadership team to collaborate in the decision making process. Interestingly, this was not the case. While the administrative leadership team experienced less than ideal micropolitical relationships, the school performed with a higher degree of success because the principal was insistent upon teachers and administrators adhering to a philosophy of meeting student needs regardless of the cost.

## **Leadership Style and Organizational Structure**

The rules and guidelines of micropolitics are defined by the organizational structure of the school, and the principal establishes the organizational structure that best matches their preferred style of leadership.

The principal at School A prefers a traditional approach and has established a well-defined organizational structure with a classic hierarchy with well-defined roles and formal relationships. Employing “power over others” (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014), she assigns roles and

responsibilities to the members of her leadership team. The organizational structure at School A is well-defined, predictable, and controlled, with program development to address the deficiencies of specific students. As decisions are made there is very little discussion or formal questioning of the rationale by teachers, and teachers are held accountable to implement interventions with fidelity.

Led by a collaborative leader, the organizational structure at School B encourages exchanges between the principal, members of the administrative leadership team, and teachers as equals where all stake holders engage in a dialogue to find solutions to problems (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014). The drawback is that process is more important than product, therefore the school lacks a singular impetus for the establishment of clear expectations of teachers and students. After consideration of a wide range of feedback from multiple sources, decisions are finalized, and shared with the teachers.

The organizational framework at School C is fluid and complex. Sharing his power by establishing individualized relationships with his teachers and staff (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2010, p. 531), the principal at School C encourages his teachers and administrators to be self-determinate, making decisions as they deem appropriate. Trusted teachers are left to their own devices while those without a relationship with the principal are often left without guidance or support. The absence of departmental expectations creates an environment where the educational experience in any class is dependent upon the scheduling of teachers, and grades are inconsistent.

Figure 1 is a pictorial representation of the organizational structure at School A. The principal holds the position of formal authority, making unilateral decisions that impact the culture and climate of the school. Information flows from teachers to teacher leaders and then to

the principal where decisions are made. The administrative leadership team implements policies and procedures, performing additional duties as assigned by the principal.

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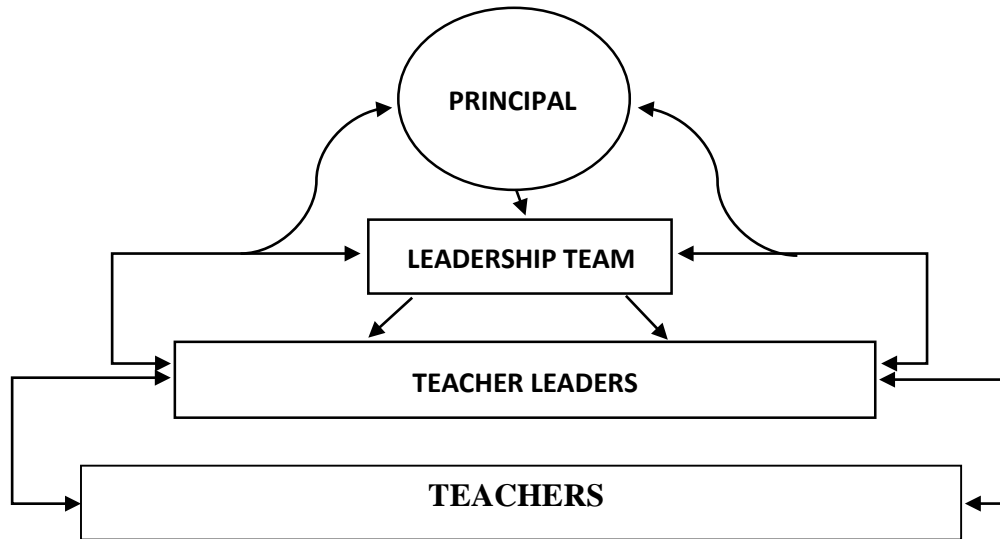


Figure 1: Organizational Structure at School A. Based on interview data, this flow chart is a representation of the formal organizational structure at School A. The principal is the leader of the school and all decisions are made by her. Information considered in the decision making process flows upward from teachers to the teacher leaders then shared with the principal. The administrative leadership team is responsible for implementation of policies and procedures determined by the principal.

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Figure 2 represents the flow of information used to make decisions at School B. The principal is at the center of the organizational structure with direct access to teachers and junior administrators throughout the decision making process.

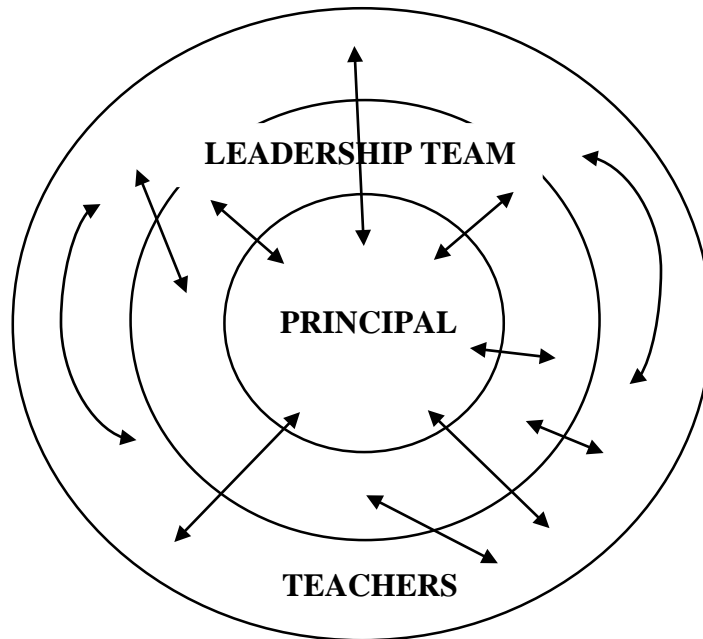


Figure 2: Organizational Structure at School B. This diagram represents the flow of information considered in the decision making process and the shared responsibility for implementation of new policies and procedures. Teachers, members of the administrative leadership team, and the principal have direct access to one another, and feedback and input from teachers and junior administration are solicited prior to the final decision by the principal.

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The organizational structure at School C, driven by the individual relationships established between the principal, junior administrators, and teachers is complex and dependent upon the quality of the relationship established between the principal and the teacher. Figure 3 is a representation of the effects that individual relationships have on the sharing of information, the decision making process, and the effects of individual relationships on the implementation of policies and procedures.

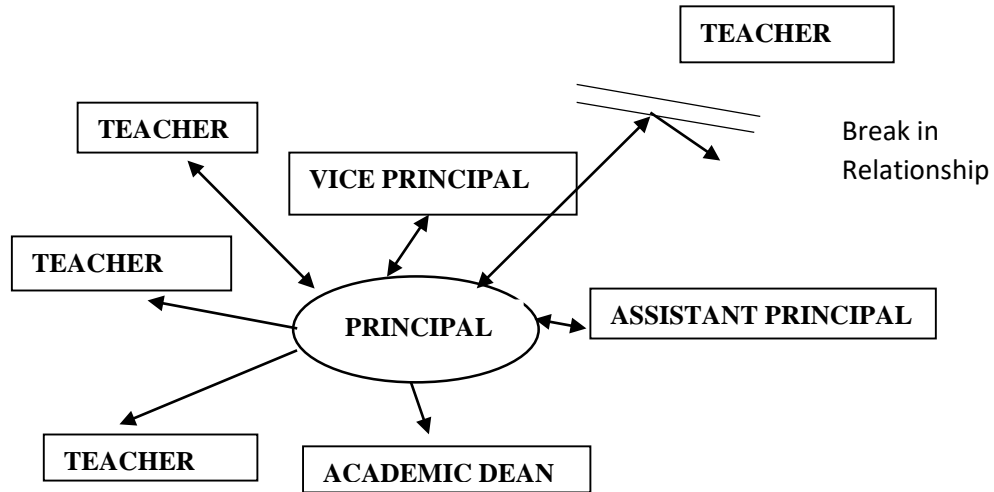


Figure 3: Organizational Structure at School C. The principal establishes individual relationships with each member of his staff and grants autonomy based on the strength of the relationship. Members of the administrative leadership team have the authority to make decisions based on situational need. Teachers with strong relationships with the principal have the freedom to make individual decisions that affect their classes, take risks, and assess grades as they deem appropriate.

## **Micropolitics in the Context of Organizational Structure**

If micropolitics refers to conversations and interactions intended to use one's power and influence over others to achieve a desired goal (Blasé, 1981 p.11), these conversations and interactions must take place within the context of the school and organizational structure. Conversations that take place in a traditional hierarchical organization look different and follow a different set of rules than those that take place in either collaborative organizations or empowered organizations.

Ball (1987) makes the observation that leadership styles aren't fixed and are subject to change given the circumstance that the principal finds themselves. Just as schools change over time, so do leadership styles as the principal seeks to find the right match to meet the specific needs of their school.

Leadership roles that are based on power are an important aspect in the micropolitical environment found in a traditional organizational hierarchy (Vanderslice, 1998, p. 678). The higher positions of leadership possess and wield more power and authority than those who hold lower positions. In a school, the principal has the final word with those with lesser authority expected to obey.

This is certainly evident in the micropolitics at School A. The principal exerts her power and influence to make decisions, hold others accountable for their actions, and communicate a clear set of expectations regarding the importance of student achievement. The roles assigned to the members of the administrative leadership team are formal, with specific assignments and clear expectations for outcomes. Functioning as a working group (Lencioni, 2012), each member of the administrative leadership team is expected to perform their assigned duties, often independent of one another, and are continually monitored and held accountable by the principal.

The characterization of the micropolitical environment on this campus by the vice principal as top down and resembling that of a dictatorship align with the traditional management style: telling people what to do, how they are to do it, and consequences for not doing as they were told. Because micropolitics in schools led by managerial, principals tend to be limited to topics selected by the principal there is limited opportunity for members of the administrative team to engage in the conversations they desire to seek productive, and creative ways to meet the needs of students (Vanderslice, 1998, p. 680).

Caution should be exercised before passing judgment on what is characterized as a draconian leadership style by the vice principal. Savvy, with many years of practical experience, there is the possibility that the principal is “reading” the environmental influences that affect her school, employing the principles of Contingency Theory, and making the necessary adjustments that while appear to be harsh, are designed to meet the needs of her students (Smith, 1984).

The definition of roles in a collaborative organizational structure are not as formalized as those in a traditional hierarchy. Collaborative leaders prefer an organizational structure that is not top-down, but rather rely on an exchange between individuals seen almost as equals where diverse opinions are welcomed and openly discussed in search of solutions. Members of the administrative leadership team work together very closely, almost as family. The principal at School B finds her strength by working with her administrative leadership team to accomplish common goals and sharing her power (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014). The members of the administrative leadership team have direct access to the principal with the freedom to make suggestions for improvement, and are encouraged to be vocal even when there is a possibility of disagreement, By inviting others to bring diverse and creative ideas to the table, in search of making decisions in the best interests of students, the principal has administrative leadership



team becomes a “think tank”, using their collective expertise to identify problems and design strategies to solve them. There is freedom on this campus to voice opinions without fear, contributing to a continual dialogue to look for ways to improve.

Again, caution should be exercised before making judgements about the effectiveness of the collaborative leadership style at School B. Rather than placing their focus on product, they are investing time and energy to create a process that can be replicated year to year, leading to continual student improvement over time.

The definition of roles in empowered schools become transparent, identified only as a job title, accompanied by the independence to make decisions without consent of the principal. Sharing power by establishing individualized relationships with his staff (Vecchio, Justin., & Pearce, 2010, p. 531), the principal at School C enables his teachers and administrators to be self-determinate by encouraging them and granting them the freedom to perform as they deem appropriate. Each administrator performs a different job with different characteristics that often don't overlap, so there is no requirement for the members of the administrative leadership team to share things with one another, but they do because of the established relationship that they have with the principal and one another.

### **Communication**

The success of formal communication is dependent on the skill of the participants in practicing effective communication skills with awareness of the type and quality of the relationship existing between them. Since formal relationships in a school are defined by the role that individuals hold, conversations between the principal and other administrators on campus will look and sound different from conversations between the principal and teachers, or between other members of the administrative leadership team and teachers.

When messages are communicated and promises kept, trust between individual's increases. Conversely, when messages are misinterpreted or misunderstood, or promises are not kept, trust suffers. Regardless of leadership style or organizational structure, the establishment of and maintaining a high level of trust between the principal, the members of the administrative leadership team, and teachers play a significant role on the establishment of confidence that teachers and parents have in the ability of the administration.

In traditional settings, communication is structured by the establishment of a chain of command where ideas are discussed in committees prior to formal presentation to the principal for consideration. A master of technical communication (Weaver, 1949), the principal at School A crafts messages that focus on the establishment and reinforcement of a clear mission statement and specific, outcome-based goals for students that are aligned with curriculum, that include targeted staff development opportunities for teachers to meet the needs of students. There is no doubt that this communication from the principal to teachers is powerful in that expectations are established with clarity of purpose. Student needs drive the campus, and teachers are aware of the priorities. Communication within the administrative leadership team is just as clear, and principal driven.

On a collaborative campus communication is not the top-down, directive oriented dissemination of specific, factual information that is found on traditional campuses, but rather a dialogue, where diverse opinions are welcomed and openly discussed in search of solutions. Feedback is solicited from each department and teacher and is designed to give each person a voice in the process. The leadership team considers all the information that has been gathered and makes decisions to move forward on those that most meet the needs of students, with no idea discarded without discussion. Communication is enhanced by a common context of sharing

information to meet the needs of students, with an established process designed to encourage participation from all stake holders (Turaga, 2016).

Most communication on empowerment campuses are individualized, with the quality of conversations influenced by the depth of the relationship that has been established with the principal. Since relationships with teachers are individualized, those with strong relationships benefit while teachers with strained relationships may feel left out (Bolino and Turnley, 2009). While this leadership style is effective for those who choose to develop a personal relationship the principal at School C recognizes that his leadership style may not a good match for some of the teachers on the campus.

### **Negotiation and Resolution of Conflict**

By definition, micropolitics is the use of power and influence by an individual to gain a desired outcome, and negotiation and the resolution of conflict are important to the micropolitical process. As administrative leadership teams meet to discuss issues, consider solutions, and make decisions, there is a level of negotiation that occurs as members offer ideas that they believe are most appropriate. When there is a lack of consensus or disagreement, ideally the team discusses the options, negotiates an acceptable solution agreed to by all, and move forward.

The range of negotiation and resolution of conflict in administrative leadership teams is dependent upon the leadership style of the principal, Traditional authoritative principals who have established an organizational hierarchy work to limit negotiation by exerting control. When a junior administrator at School A observes that there is a definite leader who decides to spend time addressing a specific issue, and if she isn't in agreement suggestions made by them, this illustrates the principal exerting her power to control the outcome and eliminate negotiation or resolution of conflict, since conflict is discouraged since it challenges authority,

In the collaborative school, negotiation and resolution of conflict are an expectation of the process that is followed by the administrative leadership team. The administrative leadership team believes that they work together as family. While recognizing that disagreements occur, these disagreements are treated with respect since the team has an understanding to agree to disagree, always keeping the best interest of their students as their priority.

Negotiation and resolution of conflict at an empowered school look totally different from those of the traditional hierarchical school or the collaborative school. The perception at School C is that the administrative leadership team works very well together without any animosity or power struggle, and that the principal is there to facilitate anything that is required from the perspective of the principal. When there are disagreements, they are resolved on an individual basis that is not necessarily addressed by the administrative leadership team. Members will go behind doors and vent, and once the concern is shared with another member of the administrative leadership team, they move on without bringing the disagreement to the table. The individual relationships that have been established on the campus encourage individual administrators to resolve their own conflicts on an individual basis without involving others in the process. For the most part, negotiations are successful and there is little evidence that there are long-term effects of differences of opinion.

### **Culture and Climate**

Culture and climate are important to the success of the school. School culture reflects the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths held by members of the school community (Stolp and Smith, 1994) while climate is a measurement of the quality of school life.

The three schools, while different in many ways, exhibit both strong cultures and positive climates that are conducive to teaching and learning. The principal at School A makes it a priority to communicate academic and behavioral expectations and goals to teachers and

students, identifying gaps in student learning, and developing programs to reduce or eliminate these gaps. At the beginning of each year, teachers follow the tenets of Capturing Kids Hearts by taking the time to build positive relationships with their students, develop a common language, create classroom collaborative social contracts, and identify positive behaviors. These behaviors are reinforced throughout the year by implementation of PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) where positive behavior by students is recognized by tangible rewards, resulting in a strong culture and positive climate between teachers and students. The culture within the administrative leadership team is equally strong because the desired norms, values, and beliefs for the school are held by each member of the team. The climate suffers because members of the team experience frustration because they believe that their views and opinions are not valued by the principal.

Teachers are supported in discipline and grading as long as they adhere to the policies and procedures established by the administration. Documentation and parental contact are non-negotiable, and are intended to support the relationships between teachers and parents. Teachers are granted latitude regarding the curricular scope and calendar, and the philosophy regarding the STAAR assessment is that the test will take care of itself as long as there is effective teaching and quality learning taking place in the classroom. The priority for the campus is continual growth by students.

The culture at School B is strong because all administrators and teachers have an opportunity to contribute to the collective system of beliefs for the school and so the culture becomes integrated into the day to day life on campus. The climate is continually evolving as well because of the collaborative philosophy adopted by the administration, and is a natural outcome of the collaborative process. Teachers are encouraged to development healthy

relationships with their students, and the school has made a conscious effort to include parents, and the community into the school as partners in learning.

Teachers enjoy administrative support in grading issues, but some experience a level of frustration with the campus decision to significantly reduce the use of ISS as the primary disciplinary action in favor of non-traditional consequences. Teachers have some flexibility in the curricular calendar, with STAAR seen as a snapshot appraisal rather than an annual evaluation.

Analysis of the culture and climate at School C is a bit more complex due to the personal relationships that have been established between the principal and individual administrators and teachers on the campus. Within the group that has developed these relationships, the culture is quite strong and the climate healthy. The difficulty in the establishment of a strong learning culture is a result of the absence of departmental grading policies that should provide guidance and expectations for teachers who have not entered into personal relationships with the principal. The climate, while positive for the most part, suffers a bit because of the underlying feelings of resentment by teachers who choose not to engage in relationships, and view themselves as outsiders. While these teachers are in the minority, there is a measurable effect on the academic achievement of students.

For the most part, teachers feel supported by the administration in the areas of academics and discipline, though there is a measurable degree of shopping for administrators who they believe give tougher consequences than others. The instructional scope and sequence are at the discretion of the individual teacher, and the STAAR assessment, while important, does not drive instruction on this campus.

Two areas were observed to be constant across all three schools studied that affect school climate: the perception that there are favorites on the campus and the perception of weak discipline of students.

Described as a political phenomenon by Blasé (1988), the perception that there is favoritism is found on every campus. When individuals perceive that there is a privileged group, real or imagined, those who are not recipients of favorable status attribute the discrepancy to favoritism. Most times, teachers who volunteer, serve on committees, and give of their time are seen as favorites of the administration, while in reality, exposure to working alongside the administration as colleagues is the source of the alleged favored status. The consequence of this working relationship is to create the illusion of an inner and outer circle of influence and favor that is resented by those who view themselves as members of the outer circle.

When teachers believe that their desire for a student receive a consequence for a disciplinary infraction that they believe is egregious and results in minor consequences given by the administration, this perception of lack of support can negatively affect the climate of the school. The quandary faced by administration between keeping students in the classroom where they are exposed to learning opportunities versus removal to either in-school suspension or off campus suspension is difficult to resolve. As alternative disciplinary solutions designed to keep students in the classroom begin to replace exclusionary consequences become more widespread, the challenge facing administrative leadership teams to convince teachers that these alternatives are both effective and equitable will determine the success of their use.

### **Outcomes of Campus Micropolitics**

The overriding questions to be answered are, how important are micropolitics, culture, and climate of the school to student achievement? What are the variables that contribute to student

success, and what implications do these variables have on current and future educational practice in our schools?

The criteria for scores on state assessments is continually changing, and so to place assessment data into context, all scores have been normed using the state average for the year analyzed. Because socio-economic status has a significant impact on predicting student performance on state assessments, it is important that the percentage of students who receive free and reduced lunch be factored into the analysis.

The analysis of STAAR data was performed by comparing the student cohort pass rates from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The assumption was made that the majority of students enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup> grade remained on the campus and took the STAAR all three years. Seventh grade math is not considered because the state re-calibrated the cut scores for the 2015 STAAR math administration so pass rates were unavailable. Tables include state passing percentages, overall campus performance, and achievement levels of recognized subgroups

STAAR assessment data for School A shows that except 6<sup>th</sup> grade math, the cohort performs above the state average in math and reading. While overall scores are at or above the state average, students with special needs, students identified as economically disadvantaged, and English language learners struggle to meet the state average.

It is evident that School A has worked diligently to eliminate performance gaps and improve educational experiences for their students. This success can be attributed to a strong culture resulting from the communication of clear expectations, the disaggregation of data to the design programs to meet the needs of students, an emphasis on building strong, healthy relationships with students, and the professional commitment of teachers to make a difference.



Table 5 School A Three Year Cohort STAAR Performance

2016 School A STAAR 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 8 | 87    | 91     | 78 | 91       | 95    |          |    | 100       | 38 | 88     | 78  |
| Math 8 | 82    | 88     | 87 | 87       | 97    |          |    |           | 46 | 87     | 67  |

2015 School A STAAR 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Cohort Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 7 | 79    | 83     | 75 | 87       | 92    |          |    |           |    | 84     | 75  |

2014 School A STAAR 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Cohort Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 6 | 78    | 81     | 74 | 79       | 92    |          |    | 100       | 55 | 77     | 54  |
| Math 6 | 79    | 68     | 68 | 81       | 92    |          |    | 100       | 55 | 79     | 54  |

Table 5: STAAR passing percentages for the cohort starting as 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2014 and completing 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 the Adopted from Texas Academic Performance Report available at [Tea.texas.gov](http://Tea.texas.gov).

The data for School B shows that the campus consistently scores below the state average on the reading and math assessments each year. White students in in the cohort outperform the state in 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and 6<sup>th</sup> grade math, all students in 7th grade math, African American students in writing, White and Hispanic students in science, and White students in social studies.

Table 6 School B Three Year Cohort STAAR Performance

2016 School B STAAR 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 8 | 87    | 86     | 70 | 86       | 91    | 100      |    | 100       | 40 | 84     | 58  |
| Math 8 | 82    | 70     | 65 | 69       | 76    |          |    | 100       | 26 | 68     | 24  |

2015 School B STAAR 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 7 | 79    | 73     | 67 | 74       | 78    | 86       |    |           | 24 | 70     | 61  |

2014 School B STAAR 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 6 | 78    | 74     | 70 | 73       | 95    |          |    |           | 63 | 70     | 55  |
| Math 6 | 79    | 76     | 70 | 76       | 81    |          |    | 100       | 58 | 72     | 62  |

Table 6: STAAR passing percentages for the cohort starting as 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2014 and completing 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 the Adopted from Texas Academic Performance Report available at [Tea.texas.gov](http://Tea.texas.gov).

A possible explanation for these low scores could be attributed to the widespread use of in-school suspension, removing students from the classroom and instruction as the preferred disciplinary consequence for the campus through 2016. Another possible explanation for low scores could be attributed to the process oriented philosophy of the campus with the emphasis is on student growth rather than one-time performance on the state assessment.

As expected, School C outperforms the state average as a campus and a cohort. School C struggles to meet the needs special education students and English language learners. Cohort students who are economically disadvantaged or African American also outperform the state with the exception of African American students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math.

Table 7 School C Three Year Cohort STAAR Performance

2016 School C STAAR 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA  | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|-----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 8 | 87    | 95     | 78  | 91       | 95    |          |    | 100       | 38 | 88     | 43  |
| Math 8 | 82    | 88     | 100 | 93       | 97    | 100      |    | 83        | 58 | 90     | 58  |

2015 School C STAAR 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 7 | 79    | 89     | 89 | 84       | 94    | 94       |    | 100       | 55 | 76     | 42  |

2014 School C STAAR 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Performance

| Test   | State | Campus | AA | Hispanic | White | AI Asian | PI | 2 or more | SE | EcoDis | ELL |
|--------|-------|--------|----|----------|-------|----------|----|-----------|----|--------|-----|
| Read 6 | 78    | 92     | 89 | 88       | 96    | 94       |    | 89        | 70 | 87     | 64  |
| Math 6 | 79    | 94     | 88 | 92       | 96    | 100      |    | 100       | 79 | 89     | 79  |

Table 7: STAAR passing percentages for the cohort starting as 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2014 and completing 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 2016 the Adopted from Texas Academic Performance Report available at [Tea.texas.gov](http://Tea.texas.gov).

While some of the success the school enjoys can be attributed to the low percentage of economically disadvantaged students, the freedom that teachers have in planning lessons and taking risks in implementing creative instructional strategies cannot be ignored. When teachers aren't limited by departmental grading policy or adherence to a predetermined curricular calendar, they are free to design differentiated lessons and teach at a pace individualized for their group of students.

There are some drawbacks other than some teachers not having a relationship with the principal. The lack of a standardized grading policy combined with individualized classrooms

can result in inconsistencies in the educational experience for students and “shopping” by parents and students for teachers lenient in grading or an attractive instructional approach.

Each of the principals of the three schools participating in the study have their own unique approach to leadership and organizational structure that impacts the micropolitical environment of the administrative leadership team. While it cannot be proven that the quality of micropolitical exchanges within the administrative leadership team have a significant impact on the culture or student success, it can be assumed that the quality of micropolitics within the administrative leadership team do have an effect on the climate, and the quality of the climate, affecting the efficiency and efficacy of the team as they perform their duties.

The responsibilities of school leadership are greater than the capacity of any single individual, and there are times that situations will arise where the team must rely on the support of one another. Without support, the team could experience a degree of divineness that could negatively affect the school. While not observed during this study, there were indications that a breakdown of the integrity of an administrative leadership team could be possible.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited to the analysis of published data for the three participating schools from the 2013 through 2016 academic school years and personal interviews of staff conducted during the 2016 -2017 academic year. Data analyzed includes interview data, student and teacher demographics, generic school improvement plans, and STAAR results. While STAAR data has been used for comparison purposes, the superintendent has made is clear that while STAAR is important, it is simply a snap shot and is not an accurate descriptor of the quality of schools.

Generic school improvement plans were developed based on interview responses by members of the school administrative leadership teams.

Due to scheduling constraints, administrative leadership team meetings were not attended or observed, and the perceptions of interactions and relationships between members of the administrative leadership teams was derived from the interview data. The findings of these personal interviews are limited to formal micropolitical conversations and interactions between the members of the school's administrative leadership team and department coordinators and do not consider any informal conversations or interactions.

Analysis of the impacts of leadership style on campus micropolitics, culture, climate, and student achievement are limited to the scope of this study and do not necessarily implicate that generalization can be made to the general population.

## **Conclusion**

Since campus micropolitics are significantly impacted by the leadership style of the principal (Ball, 1987), to alleviate any potential misunderstandings that could fragment the team, it is extremely important that principals have a thorough understanding of their preferred leadership style as well as the preferred styles of their junior administrators. Regardless of the organizational structure established by the principal, the scope, and responsibility placed on school leadership has far exceeded the capability of a single individual to perform these duties, and so the utilization of an administrative leadership team is essential for the day to day operation of the school.

It is important that the members of the campus administrative leadership team should share a common philosophical and functional understanding of their roles and responsibilities as members of the administrative leadership team, and the principal needs to be clear in their expectations of the administrative leadership team. Are they to be a working group, assigned specific duties with limited responsibility to the whole organization, or a leadership team that

works together holistically, assuming duties and responsibilities as they see necessary? Are they to be a group at all?

Relationships can be strained when there is not a clear understanding of expectations. Part of the frustration experienced by the members of the administrative leadership team at School A was caused by the mixed messages the principal sent to the administrative leadership team and teachers about the collaborative philosophy of the school. When members of the administrative leadership team attempted to engage in what they believed were collaborative activities and conversations, they were either told that they had limited input or that their opinions didn't matter, resulting in disappointment, frustration, and resentment. While the school is extremely successful, there is a possibility that their success could be improved upon if the administrative leadership team functioned at a higher level of efficiency with reduced frustration and resentment if they knew the "rules of the game".

Principals who understand leadership styles of the other members of their administrative leadership teams can use this knowledge to their advantage, tapping into the strength of others to compensate for their own weaknesses. Done correctly, this not only strengthens the overall effectiveness of the administrative leadership team, it also creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust because each member sees themselves as a valuable asset to the organization. When decisions are finalized, each member can use their own unique style to reach out to individual staff members that identify with their leadership style.

Effective communication is essential to the quality of campus micropolitics, and influenced by the principal. Is the purpose of conversation to share thoughts and ideas in an attempt to find new and more efficient solutions for problems, or is the purpose of conversation to convince others, using power or influence, to see things our way? Even in the most collaborative settings,

there is an undercurrent of desire by members of the administrative leadership team to convince others to see their way. Administrators need to know how to engage in micropolitical conversations to achieve their intended goal without relying on overt power but rather influence and negotiation. They must be ready to compromise, willing to give in some areas to gain in others. Traditional, authoritative, and managerial principals tend to control micropolitics to reduce or eliminate the potential risk of loss of power or influence, while collaborative principals encourage open micropolitical conversations so that there is an atmosphere of sharing and transparency.

Individuals who engage in micropolitics on campuses with empowerment principals value the feeling of power that individual relationships provide. The feeling of self-determination that a teacher enjoys in this environment allows the teacher to blossom, make instructional decisions, and engage in acceptable risk to improve the educational experiences of their students.

There are inherent drawbacks in an empowerment driven school. Not all teachers or administrators have the desire to enter into relationships or desire self-determination, finding solace in organizational structures that provide specific policies and procedures. Empowered schools risk discrepancies of educational experiences that students have from classroom to classroom, and teacher to teacher because of the freedom that teachers have to make individual instructional decisions.

### **Implications for Practice**

The ability of school leadership to communicate goals and expectations to teachers, students, and the community is extremely important in the establishment of a positive school culture, climate, and student success. To transform schools and move them forward, administrative leadership teams must work to eliminate unnecessary friction between members that may cause

the team to fracture. To accomplish this, school districts would find it beneficial to assist campus administrators in understanding their preferred leadership style, discover their personal strengths and weaknesses, and how this knowledge can be used to improve the effectiveness of the administrative leadership team on their campus. The administrative leadership team should meet annually to revisit and clarify the organizational structure of the school, define and assign roles and responsibilities to members of the team, and discuss strategies for the establishment of a protocol for resolving conflict. Principals should take the time to clarify expectations and beliefs about distribution of power and the organizational structure of the school.

Once the organizational structure and the distribution of power has been established, the team should engage in conversations with the purpose of discovering the strengths and weaknesses of each team member. This knowledge of strengths and weaknesses can be used to improve the effectiveness of the team by utilizing the strengths of individuals to compensate for the weaknesses of others. Regardless of the organizational structure or the leadership style of the principal, an ideal composition of the administrative leadership team would include at least one member with a different style preference. Every teacher on campus should have an administrator that they can relate to and communicate with. All teams can benefit from collaborative members who focus on involvement of all, empowering members who build individual the relationships with teachers, and traditional managerial members who can organize, schedule, and implement new programs, structures, and ideas with fidelity.

New administrative teams, beginning as working groups with assigned roles and responsibilities, should work to transform themselves into a true leadership team that functions holistically, with all members sharing tasks and responsibilities that best of their abilities. The



ideal goal is for the team to eventually identify and solve problems and issues in an organic fashion with each member operating in harmony with the others.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

The better understanding that leadership in schools have of the dynamics of micropolitics and the effects micropolitics play on the culture, climate, and student achievement of the school, the better prepared they will be to use micropolitics as a tool to achieve their goals. A longitudinal study of school-wide micropolitics incorporating immersion into the leadership team by the researcher would add insight to the effects of micropolitics at all levels, contributing to the body of knowledge of how schools struggle with contradictory expectations of administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community. Adding a quantitative survey of teachers working in schools led by principals with differing leadership styles would allow researchers to analyze how differing leadership styles effect and shape the environments in which they work.

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