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# A Quantitative Study of the Impact of Leadership on School Culture in a Small Rural School District as Measured by Stakeholder Satisfaction

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A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP ON SCHOOL  
CULTURE IN A SMALL RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT AS MEASURED BY  
STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION

By  
Hope Littlejohn

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner Webb University  
2021

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Hope Littlejohn under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Abstract**

A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP ON SCHOOL CULTURE IN A SMALL RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT AS MEASURED BY STAKEHOLDER SATISFACTION. Littlejohn, Hope, 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This study examined the relationship of school leadership on school culture. Given the demands on educational leaders, the goal is to improve student achievement and school culture. The literature review examines the previous study of the history of school leadership, history of school culture, effective school leadership, elements of effective school culture, and public perception as it relates to school culture. The literature review discusses leadership styles and how each one contributes to positive school culture as perceived by various stakeholders to build the case for the current study. The study uses the School Culture Triage Survey by Wagner (2002). It is a 17-item Likert scale survey defining three variables—professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy. The analysis was done with hierarchical linear modeling and stepwise multiple regression. By using the combination of methods, it was confirmed that leadership does have a statistically significant impact on school culture. A positive correlation was found to exist in all schools with variables with comparison to professional collaboration. In schools, including the three middle schools in this study, school leaders need to focus on valuing teacher ideas, trusting the professional judgment of teachers, praising teachers who perform well, involving teachers in decision-making, facilitating teachers working together, keeping teachers informed about current issues, rewarding teachers for experimenting with new ideas and techniques, supporting risk-

taking and innovation in teaching, and protecting instruction and planning time.

*Keywords:* school culture, school leadership, student achievement, stakeholders

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

There is ongoing pressure facing educational leaders to improve student achievement and school culture. Past and present researchers seek to focus on how leadership directly impacts effective positive culture as measured by stakeholder satisfaction. Three types of leadership affect school culture: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. The leadership styles identified impact school culture through either the school's values, beliefs, or collaborative efforts.

A transformational leader works with subordinates to identify needed change, creates a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executes the change in unison with committed members of a group (Anderson, 2017). Transformational leaders find school officials developing strategies for improving the learning styles and grade performances in their school system. In schools today, leaders and school officials gather ideas and collaborate to determine what works to improve school culture and academics. School officials spend quality time understanding student struggles, possible learning dynamics, family concerns, and most importantly, a student's willingness to excel in the school system. The transformational leadership style helps school officials better assist the school culture from multiple angles. Leaders who exhibit transformational leadership will demonstrate the following transformational behaviors in their daily interactions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Anderson, 2017).

Transactional leadership is a leadership style that occurs when others are motivated to perform their agreed-upon roles in exchange for reward or avoidance of punishment (MacNeill et al., 2018). Transactional leaders focus on clarifying

responsibilities, performance objectives, and tasks that must be completed by others (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). The leader imposes transactions for fulfilled responsibilities and achieved performance objectives.

Leaders who adopt a laissez-faire style of leadership display a passive indifference towards their followers (Moss & Ritossa, 2007). When implemented in a school, the laissez-faire leadership approach may prove detrimental to children's success rate. Passive indifference prevents leaders from assisting students and providing them with the professional guidance they need to be successful. A laissez-faire leadership approach assumes that students have the knowledge and ambition to succeed in the school system without proper assistance from school leaders/teachers (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). On a more positive note, the laissez-faire approach could also promote student abilities to independently use their skills and talents.

School leadership directly impacts school culture and the values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of the key stakeholders within the school community. Value is a belief about truth, goodness, and ideas that serve as the basis of behavior in a community (Kholis, 2018). Values bind the unity to the school's mission and vision in order to achieve the efficacy and effectiveness of the school's goals. A good culture arises from leadership messages that promote collaboration, honesty, and hard work (Shafer, 2018). These traits translate into fundamental beliefs. Fundamental beliefs and assumptions have the power to influence school culture. Shared fundamental beliefs at the school are the things people consider to be true. Effective schools, however, suggest a clear, standard "definition of the situation" (Jerald, 2006, p. 2) for all individuals, sending a constant stream of clear signals to students and teachers about what their roles and responsibilities

are. Patterns and behaviors, or the way people act and behave in a school, directly have the means to influence the culture.

Culture shared by all stakeholders aims at short-term and long-term goals to accomplish positive school culture. For the school's success, stakeholders need to be involved in important decisions related to the governance, operation, or improvement of the school. To improve, stakeholder engagement is especially important for improving school culture because research finds that many communities are uninformed about or disconnected from their local schools. Therefore, school leadership needs to nurture stakeholder relationships. The general theory of including more community members in the educational process allows school leaders to foster a more robust school culture where everyone has a sense of ownership. In theory, there is more power in numbers and strength than there is staying disconnected from working together as one.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of school leadership on school culture in the research district. The influence school leaders have on culture is often overlooked. School culture is an essential influence on the success of student achievement and staff motivation. Prokopchuk (2016) stated, "a preliminary step to shaping school culture is for leaders, be their principals or a leadership team, to become familiar with the concept of school culture" (p. 74). In other words, school leaders must be familiar with the quality and character of the school. When school leaders can create a strong school culture, they can demonstrate leadership behavior to establish positive relationships with all stakeholders (Altinay, 2015).

This study will add to research on the impact of leadership on school culture that

supports the research that positive school culture can increase staff morale and retention, student achievement, and stakeholder satisfaction. Decisive proof that school leaders can have an impact on school culture is found when they have specific features that motivate individuals to help reach the common goal that conveys their experience; those who prepare others to change by interacting with them; motivate the staff by creating a synergy; exceed the usual practices and authorities; and affect and direct the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of the staff who are under their management (Altinay, 2015). This creates a positive school culture that increases staff morale and retention. Additionally, finding a reason for students to perform well gives the potential to mentally complement the teaching level of both school teachers and even the administrators on staff. When students perform well, it tends to change the degree of enjoyment in the students while being in the school system, promoting improved student achievement. The study was a quantitative methods study that included data from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, Advanced Ed, end-of-grade test results, discipline, and attendance records. The study included surveying educators, including school leaders and teachers, along with surveying community participants such as parents, church leaders, and business leaders. This study comes at a time when education has faced some unprecedented and challenging times. Examining the relationship between school leadership and school culture will add to the body of knowledge for establishing a positive school culture.

In a more personal way, this study adds to the goal of preparing to become a school leader and knowing how their role impacts school culture in an effort to grow in the education profession. There is a need to improve one's leadership style over time based on experience and knowledge acquisition (Sadeghi et al., 2012). This study will

add to the education and training of school leaders which can be coupled with their experience to improve school culture. The research field will be enhanced with this study because as many continue to train and teach other educators to become more effective, evidence will be available to further support effective leadership that impacts school culture.

The research questions of this study were

1. How does school leadership impact the school culture for all stakeholders?
2. How do teacher and staff beliefs about a positive school culture contribute to the school culture?
3. How does a positive school culture impact student academics, discipline, and attendance?

This study was performed to measure the impact leadership has on school culture. School culture was examined through the lens of professional collaboration and affiliative collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy was evaluated to measure the impact of school culture based on the beliefs of teachers and staff. Additionally, this study provides revelation for how school culture can impact student academics, discipline, and attendance.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The school culture is made up of the interactions between and among the staff, students, and community. Leaders need to understand their role in creating and sustaining a positive school culture to benefit student achievement. Fullan (2010) suggested that leaders follow Herold and Fedor's (2008, as cited in Fullan, 2010) key points for building a school culture:

- Careful entry to the new setting.
- Listening to and learning from those who have been there longer.
- Engaging in fact-finding and joint problem-solving.
- Forthrightly addressing people's concerns.
- Being enthusiastic, genuine, and sincere about the change circumstances.
- Obtaining buy-in for what needs fixing.
- Developing a credible plan for making that fix. (p. 18)

The actions listed above demonstrate a willingness to collaborate to deepen the effectiveness of the culture of the school; however, too often, leaders do not follow these key points, leading to the lack of positive school culture which created this study's problem.

Carpenter (2014) supported the idea that many influences affect culture. "The purpose of [his] investigation was to explore supportive and shared leadership structures at schools as a function of school culture policies and procedures" (p. 682). This approach allows for multiple strong minds to work together to serve the students and school culture. Having multiple opinions allow for the understanding of different approaches to help others. Multiple approaches allow room to help students who have different learning concerns versus those who require less assistance. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a part of the culture at the schools. A summary of an effective school culture and effective PLCs was provided by Carpenter, who proposed that the elements of effective school culture and effective PLCs include shared purpose and values, collaborative culture, engagement in problem-solving and collective inquiry, and a focus on continuous improvement. A positive school culture places emphasis on

improving teaching and building relationships to have the largest impact on student motivation, engagement, and achievement. Building relationships within the student culture has been proven to be effective in helping students grow. This method of a PLC helps the teachers begin to establish a rapport for better results for the students. Learning how to establish a connection and becoming closer both emotionally and/or academically with students has a successful impact on student culture performance (Carpenter, 2014). The PLC method shows students they have someone in their corner who cares for their best interest in assisting them during times of need and has the potential of inciting the student's willingness to learn (Carpenter, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

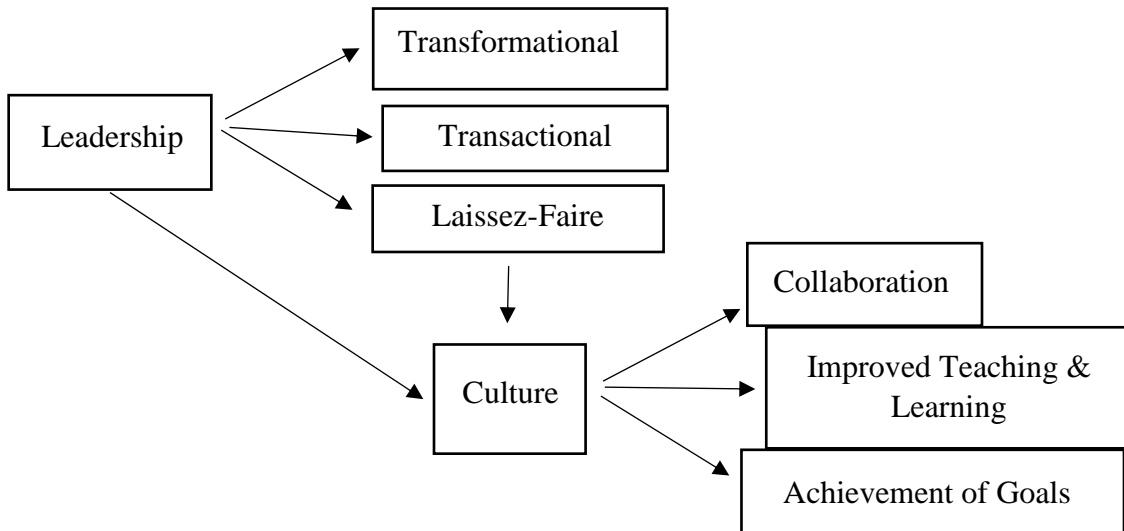
The theoretical framework introduces and describes the structure to support a theory of a research study (Abend, 2008). To better understand the predictive nature of leadership on culture, the theoretical framework in the study was created using the current literature on school culture, school leadership, leadership styles, and public perception related to school culture. Belief in the success of schools requires effective school culture. The demonstration for effective positive school culture is the direct impact of school leadership.

Based on the literature, the theoretical framework was created. The theoretical framework developed for this study appears in Figure 1. Three prominent leadership styles form the basis for studying leadership: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. Leadership predicts positive school culture determined by the values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of various stakeholders. This theoretical framework is also illuminated through collaboration, improved teaching and learning, and achievement of

goals.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Framework*



Schein (2004) added to the studies of culture and its effects on an organization that leaders have ideals or beliefs that are part of their cultural background. Such effects inadvertently transfer to how they lead the culture of a school. Additionally, culture is learned, especially from the leader, and becomes inherited by old and new members. Miller (1981) added to the meaning of school culture by stating that positive school culture creates a cohesive environment between students and staff. School culture, whether positive or negative, becomes the quality and character of the school. Therefore, the direct study of student success is applicable to measure whether a school has a strong positive school culture.

Leadership that produces a collaborative environment has a clear sense of duty and purpose. Leadership also develops positive relationships, which can transform the school into different levels of positive results when managed properly. Collaborative



leadership has been shown to have a positive correlation to teacher efficacy (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015) and is an initial driver in school improvement (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Therefore, school leadership can have a negative or positive effect on school culture which leads to either a negative or positive correlation of teacher efficacy and school improvement.

Any prominent school leadership style directly impacts school culture. The opportunity to improve school culture lies within the direct effect of school leadership. School leadership that centers on the leader's ability to promote values and shared beliefs affecting the behaviors of various stakeholders seems to positively impact school culture. The most affected stakeholders would be teachers. Ingersoll (2007) stated,

Schools in which teachers have more control over key school-wide and classroom decisions have fewer issues with student misbehaviors, show more collegiality and cooperation among teachers and administrators. These same schools have a more committed and engaged teaching staff and do a better job of retaining their teachers. (p. 24)

Ultimately, this will affect the school stakeholders and consequently have a positive effect on student achievement.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to offer clarity of the terms used throughout this study.

#### ***Culture***

The totality of the organizational experience (Marion, 2002).

***Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM)***

A complex form of ordinary least squares regression that is used to analyze variance in the outcome variables when the predictor variables are at varying hierarchical levels. HLM applies when the observations in a study form groups and when those groups are in some way randomly selected (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

***Laissez-Faire Leadership***

A type of behavior in which leaders display a passive indifference towards their followers (Moss & Ritossa, 2007).

***School Improvement***

Teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders working together to value school advancement.

***Stakeholders***

Anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators; teachers; staff members; students; parents; families; community members; local business leaders; and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

***Stakeholder Satisfaction***

A measurement of stakeholder perceptions of a program, project, or initiative (Spacey, 2018). It is measured by asking stakeholders to rate their satisfaction on a numerical scale. In this research, stakeholders completed the School Culture Triage Survey (Wagner, 2002; Appendix).

***Transactional Leadership***

Leaders who enact others to perform their roles as agreed upon in exchange for

reward or avoidance of punishment (MacNeill et al., 2018).

### ***Transformational Leadership***

A leader who works with subordinates to identify the need for change, creates a vision to guide the change, and executes the change in unison with others committed (Anderson, 2017).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study result from the limited capabilities to explore the effects of leadership on school culture. To have sufficient power in conducting a successful HLM, large samples are normally required. The survey in this study was distributed to the instructional staff of only three middle schools within one small rural district. There are approximately 135 classroom teachers employed by these three schools. Even with a 100% return rate on the survey, there was a small sample size produced.

Another factor limiting the results of this study includes the fact that only middle schools were chosen to take part in the survey. There were no volunteers to select for participation in the survey from the elementary and high schools. Also, I completed this study in the district where I work, and I am employed at one of the middle schools included in the study.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the critical effect school leadership has on school culture. Culture was introduced as a factor that impacts the satisfaction of school stakeholders; therefore, how school leadership affects culture is significant. The beliefs teachers and staff have about school culture contribute to the school culture,

thereby adding to whether this impacts student academics, discipline, and attendance. The chapter included a brief introduction of the literature describing the relationship between leadership and culture. The theoretical framework for the student was visualized, showing the relationship between leadership and culture.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on leadership, school culture, and public perception. Chapter 3 is an explanation of the methodology of the study as well as the plan for data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 situates the study's findings within the existing literature and includes recommendations for future research and practice.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Positive school culture is an essential component of a school's success for students, staff, and the community. Leadership contributes directly to an effective and positive school culture. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of leadership on school culture. This study answers, "How does school leadership ensure a positive culture exists for all stakeholders?"

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the impact of leadership on school culture as measured by various stakeholders. The review has six parts. First, the theoretical framework is reviewed. Second, the history of school leadership is reviewed to identify who makes up school leadership, what leadership means, and what it takes to be a school leader. Third, this part of the review explores the history of school culture to understand its vitality and its characteristics. Fourth, this part of the review explores the various styles of leadership and the effects these styles have on school culture. The fifth part of the literature review is an exploration of the elements of school culture and the role the culture has within the identity of a school as an organization. The sixth area is a discussion of the public perception of various stakeholders as it relates to school culture.

This chapter contains reports on current research on leadership, the measurements of school culture, and the public perception of public schools. The following subtopics guide this chapter: (a) history of school leadership, (b) history of school culture, (c) effective school leadership, (d) elements of effective school culture, and (e) public perception as it relates to school culture. The literature review will discuss leadership styles and how each contributes to positive school culture as perceived by various

stakeholders to build the case for the current study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework introduces and describes the structure to support a theory of a research study (Abend, 2008). The design of the theoretical framework for this study leads to a better understanding of the predictive nature of school leadership on the school culture. The current literature on school culture, school leadership, leadership styles, and public perception was used to create the theoretical framework. For all stakeholders, the current belief in the success of schools requires effective school culture, which includes the collaboration of all stakeholders. Also, it is true that the direct impact of school leadership is positive school culture.

The theoretical framework (Figure 1) was created based on the literature. As evident through the literature review, leadership is based on three prominent leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. It must be noted that positive leadership predicts positive school culture, which is determined by values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of various stakeholders. Additionally, the theoretical framework shows that positive shared culture leads to collaboration, improved teaching and learning, and achievement of goals.

Previous studies have shown that leaders add to culture by the ideals or beliefs that are part of their cultural background (Schein, 2004). Interestingly, culture can take on the style of the leaders, so it is important for a leader to adopt a style that will lead to a positive culture, an environment that is cohesive between students and staff. Based on the results of the theoretical framework, this study examined how well collaboration is taking place within a school setting, measured teaching and learning, and determined whether

the school is achieving its goals. The effectiveness of teaching and learning can be studied by measuring student success.

When a leader produces a cohesive and collaborative environment, there is a clear sense of duty and purpose. Within a cohesive and collaborative environment, there is an opportunity for the leader to develop positive relationships, which then can transfer into the different levels of the school, bringing positive results. Collaborative leadership has been shown to have a positive correlation to teacher efficacy (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015) and is an initial driver in school improvement (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Consequently, teacher efficacy and school improvement are directly correlated to the positive or negative effect of school leadership on the school culture.

This study led to a deeper understanding of the relationship between school culture and school leadership. The study shows which type of leadership has more of an impact on the school culture. This information added to the knowledge of how critical the school leader is to the community. The study indicated where emphasis may need to be in order to improve the culture of a school, especially as it pertains to the beliefs of teachers and staff. This ultimately emphasizes that beliefs affect the school culture and the school culture impacts student academics, discipline, and attendance. The opportunity to improve school culture will be supported by the direct impact of the school leadership, based on their prominent leadership style. Leadership style binds the leader into certain behaviors that affect how the leader promotes values, shared beliefs, and the behaviors of various stakeholders. Knowing this information led to effectively teaching the leadership styles to preservice administrators who positively influence the school culture. Teachers are the most affected stakeholders; therefore, the leadership style adopted should promote

teachers taking more control over key school-wide and classroom decisions, leading to less student misbehavior and more cooperation among teachers and school leaders, thereby resulting in committed and engaged teachers, improved community engagement, and a positive effect on student achievement.

### **History of School Leadership**

Leadership is defined as the process whereby one individual influences others toward the attainment of organizational goals. Leadership is the influence and support individuals bring to bear on the goal achievement of others in an organizational context (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). As Cashman (2008) expressed, leadership is a trustworthy power that stimulates worth in other people. Leaders have ideas or beliefs that are part of the individual leader's cultural background (Schein, 2004). When the leader becomes part of an organization, these beliefs and values become more present and evident to organizational members (Senge, 2006). Additionally, a leader is connected to the cultural manifestations of an organization (Schneider et al., 2013). When a leader is genuine in their influence, the organization will benefit from the vibrant relationship, which is why it is important to study leadership and its influence within an organization (Llopis, 2013).

With such influence in an organization, a leader must be cognizant of their own principles (Eich, 2012). The values that affect an organization are the leader's viewpoints; the leader may have viewpoints that are expressed in ways that may be encouraging (Collins, 2011). The leader's viewpoints can be expressed negatively or positively, having a direct impact on the culture of the school. Leaders being cognizant of their own personal viewpoints is a key to accomplishing organizational success (Myatt, 2012). This leadership outlook also defines the role a leader reflects towards the



organization (Senge, 2006).

Leadership has a great influence on the positive functioning of a school. Leaders are present everywhere in a school's functioning and have impactful results on a school (Goulet et al., 2012). A prime example of leadership in the school system would be a principal. A principal is the designated leader for school sites and is responsible for ensuring that the principles and values are correctly applied for student achievements (ten Bruggencate et al., 2012). Leadership such as school principals is important to the culture of the school because it adds meaning to the members. For leadership to be beneficial and positive to the school culture, they must be able to work together with others for a shared meaning. Others must accept the school and its leader; this also impacts a positive school culture. Leaders must understand the meaning that is created in the school with the students and the application to culture (Branch et al., 2013).

Leadership affects everyone in school; the students in the classroom are impacted, along with the teachers and their self-assurance (Engels et al., 2008). When students are dropped off at schools, parents must know that their children are learning and growing at the school organization (Deal & Peterson, 2009). All these examples are exactly what give the school meaning, with the stakeholders believing in the school as a meaningful part of the community, therefore relying on the positive culture embedded in the learning environment. Along with visions and dreams, good leadership brings meaning and connection to each person in the school. Stories such as a student who was unsure of being good enough to succeed or the parent who never had the chance of a good education, bring connection to the culture of the school (Deal & Peterson, 2009). This culture is important and must be understood by the leader of the school and the impact of

their dreams and visions (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This is what brings positive culture led by effective leadership and spreads to the various stakeholders in the school and community.

Classifying principals as agents of change implies that they have the most impact on changing and altering the school culture (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Principals are the leading influence when determining the culture of a school. The principal's role is often interchangeable with the terms administrator and leadership. One of the most important elements of leadership that contribute to leadership effectiveness is the style of the leader (Sadeghi et al., 2012). A leadership style is the behavior a leader exhibits while guiding organizational members in appropriate directions (Certo & Certo, 2006). Leaders improve their style over a period of time due to experience, education, and training (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Seibert et al. (2011) stated that leaders increase followers through the intrinsic value of performance and confidence, leading to higher motivation levels. A leader must be cognizant of the role they play as one tends to influence the culture of a school. This research investigated transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership and how these leadership styles affect school culture.

### **History of School Culture**

In the article "How to Define School Culture and Elevate Your Teaching," Mitchell (2019) described culture simply:

Culture is the embodiment of a community's shared driving purpose. In schools, this purpose is ideally driven by the unique needs of students, families, and staff. To create and define positive school culture, administrators, and teachers must start by identifying these needs, recognizing community assets, and making sure every decision reflects them. Whether it is clearly defined, intentionally created or

not, culture is present at every school. Culture is about implicit and explicit agreements and defines the way that a school community works together. Culture is manifest in how people enter the building, what they in how people enter the building, what they eat and who they sit at lunch, and who speaks and how much inside classrooms. It impacts the experience of everyone: staff, students, families and the community. (para. 1)

The principles of culture are learned within the group and are inherited by new members as the assimilation development cultivates (Schein, 2004). These principles are part of the cultural distinctiveness of an organization (Hofstede et al., 2010). Culture is not only a practice of understanding how to learn the problem-solving processes but also the different beliefs and behaviors those members within the group exhibit (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

A school is a place where students learn and teachers teach. When associating with a school, it is fair first to recognize the culture that the school embraces. School culture is the beliefs and values embodied in the building and the school personnel. School culture can be thought of as the adhesive that holds a school together (Deal & Peterson, 2009). School culture is assessed for its meaning and additionally the healthiness of the culture and the culture's need for improvement.

Miller (1981) continued his definition of school culture by stating that a positive school climate is one that creates cohesiveness between students and staff. At its core, school culture is the quality and character of the school. It is based on patterns of school experiences for those who work and learn there (National School Climate Council, 2007). It reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures

(National School Climate Council, 2007). Schools with strong positive cultures tend to motivate students to learn. As a result, school culture directly impacts the academics of a school. School culture can have a positive or negative effect on student success.

### **Effective School Leadership**

Leadership has a direct impact on school culture. Administrators in a collaborative environment have a clear sense of duty and purpose. Effective leadership can develop positive relationships with the members of the organization and even transform the school into a sustainable structure and a learning organization with the participation of all partners (Altinay, 2015). Leadership more directly implies a specific leadership style that describes the connections and relationships built within the school to create culture. This study examines the three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) as each directly impacts school culture.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

A leader who works with subordinates to identify needed change, create a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and execute the change in unison with committed members of a group is the embodiment of transformational leadership (Anderson, 2017). Leaders who espouse transformational leadership exhibit the following transformational behaviors in their daily interactions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Anderson, 2017). Idealized influence is providing a vision and mission while completely displaying total commitment to the vision and mission (Anderson, 2017). Also, idealized influence is perceived as an inspiring role model that is admired, respected, and trusted (Moss & Ritossa, 2007). In summary, idealized influence is most adopted by leaders who are

trusted, respected, and admired (Moss & Ritossa, 2007). Inspirational motivation includes the leader communicating high-performance expectations in an encouraging and enthusiastic fashion (Anderson, 2017). Inspirational motivation for transformational leaders describes strengthening others to view the future by optimism and act in ways that motivate those around them by providing meaning and challenge to a vision that is attractive and encouraging (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Inspirational motivation, signified by the leaders, offers meaning that is stimulating to the work of their followers to encourage and persuade their subordinates. Individualized consideration entails leaders coaching, mentoring, and providing feedback in a manner consistent with each individual's needs by carefully listening to individual needs and the ability to delegate certain responsibility to help grow others through personal challenges (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Providing individualized support is defined as leadership behavior that is centered on respect for all and consideration signified by the leaders who have a concern about their personal feelings and needs (Anderson, 2017). Individualized support takes into account every person's need for success and development by performing as a coach.

Intellectual stimulation involves the leader challenging others to embrace a new way of thinking and doing and reassessing values and beliefs (Anderson, 2017). Behavior that challenges school leadership to reexamine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed is one method of providing intellectual stimulation (Anderson, 2017). Moreover, intellectual stimulation describes leaders who stimulate others to be innovative and creative (Limsila & Ogunlana, 2008) and consider solving old organizational problems with a new perspective (Moss & Ritossa, 2007). Intellectual stimulation, summarized, is offered to the leaders who encouraged followers to search for

new methods to approach challenges and problems. In sum, intellectual stimulation is a tool that transformational leaders use to encourage followers to search for new methods to approach challenges. Transformational leadership includes another set of behaviors to encourage others to do more than required, to be proactive, to help attain unexpected goals, and to move others beyond immediate self-interest (Sadeghi et al., 2012).

Transformational leaders move others to an increased awareness about what is important and help them transcend their own self-interest for the greater good (MacNeill et al., 2018).

Transformational leadership exhibited by principals plays a key role in school improvement initiatives that include creating a positive culture focused on building a shared vision. Principals are the leaders responsible for transforming school culture to meet the increased demands of local, state, and federal stakeholders. Considering all stakeholders, teachers appreciate transformational leadership from principals with transformational leadership styles as role models who inspire trust in school staff (Allen et al., 2015). Teachers feel more positive about their school culture when principals exhibit transformational leadership, particularly when it takes the form of individualized consideration, which allows principals and teachers to have a collaborative and trusting relationship (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Teachers highly rate principals who utilize transformational leadership behaviors as they provide regular teacher support and encourage reflection. Teachers who utilize transformational leadership are perceived as polite, highly motivational, and effective student disciplinarians focused on producing responsible students (Ibrahim et al., 2014). Transformational leadership encourages leaders to provide psychological empowerment to teachers who feel their contributions

are valued (Baggett, 2015).

Transformational leadership has been shown to have a positive correlation to enhancing student achievement as well as successfully energizing students and embracing change (Allen et al., 2015). Student achievement is indirect but positively correlated to teachers committing to the school vision when leaders engage in setting direction, providing support, and developing staff (Anderson, 2017). The contribution of transformational leadership on teacher willingness to work towards improving teaching approaches and efficacy in managing classrooms has caused a positive effect on school culture (Espinoza, 2013). Student achievement because of teacher commitment, satisfaction, and teacher efficacy contributes to individualized consideration and support. Transformational leadership style is imperative for transforming schools to meet the high demands of all stakeholders.

### ***Transactional Leadership***

Transactional leadership occurs when leaders motivate others to enact their agreed-upon roles in exchange for reward or avoidance of punishment (MacNeill et al., 2018). Transactional leaders focus on clarifying responsibilities, performance objectives, and tasks that must be completed by others (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005). This type of leadership deals with maintaining the current situation and motivating people through a contractual agreement (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Transactional leaders direct followers to achieve established goals by explaining role and task requirements (Armandi et al., 2003) and by emphasizing extrinsic rewards, such as monetary incentives and promotions (Jung et al., 2008). Transactional leaders prefer to avoid risk and focus more on efficiency (Levy et al., 2002). In other words, transactional leadership involves managing or helping

organizations achieve their current objectives efficiently, such as by linking job performance to valued rewards and ensuring that employees have the resources needed to get the job done (Thakur, 2014). Transactional leaders have three primary characteristics (Thakur, 2014). First, transactional leaders work with their team members and try to get a reward for their goal. Second, they will exchange the rewards and promises of the reward for work effort. Finally, transactional leaders are responsive to the immediate self-interests of workers. Transactional leadership occurs when leaders approach followers with a transaction in mind to gain compliance in terms of effort, productivity, and loyalty. This form of leadership also occurs in exchange for rewards stemming from an economic, political, or psychological standpoint. This means that leaders recognize the basic needs and wants of followers; but given the priority on tasks, the roles are assigned according to the planned outcomes (Thakur, 2014).

Leaders who espouse transactional leadership exhibit the following behaviors: contingent reward, management-by-exception active, and management-by-exception passive (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Contingent reward describes the degree to which the leader determines rewards in exchange for other efforts to satisfy organizational goals. Contingent reward includes clarification of the work required to obtain rewards and the use of incentives to influence motivation. Leaders must clarify the expectations and present recognition when goals are accomplished (Limsila & Ogunlana, 2008). Contingent reward is the key constituent of transactional leadership, in which the leader offers rewards depending on performance (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Contingent reward behavior is equivalent to positive feedback from the leader. Such contingent reward behavior ultimately will improve the job performance of others. “Management-by-



exception active” describes the degree in which leaders examine others closely for mistakes or role violations by checking behaviors, predicting problems, and taking corrective actions before the behaviors create severe difficulties (Sadeghi et al., 2012). “Active management by exclusion” suggests that counteractive action is done in prediction of a problem (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). “Management-by-exception passive” describes the behavior of waiting for deviances, mistakes, and errors to happen and then taking corrective actions (Sadeghi et al., 2012). “Management-by-exception passive” is also showing the lack of seeking out deviations from desired performances and being reactive by only taking corrective actions after problems occur (Pounder, 2001). “Passive-management by- exception” is expressed as the leader performs remedial action upon the rise of a problem (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013).

Transactional leaders are individuals who manage followers by setting goals, allocating tasks, and completing tasks by punishing non-performers and rewarding performers. Transactional leaders please their followers by recognizing their desires (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Overall, independently, transactional leadership is less effective but could be used in combination with transformational leadership.

Transactional leadership is less correlated with higher performance and productivity than transformational leadership (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Transactional leadership is concerned more with a stable environment with slight competition, while at the same time, transactional leaders manage the things they discover and ignore other things (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Due to the lack of reward beyond the set expectations, transactional leaders contribute to the demotivation to strive for higher achievements. Transactional leaders focus solely on the reward and benefit systems and fail to address

or change their approaches if followers are unable to achieve their targets (Khan, 2017).

Although transactional leadership is related to punishment behavior and contingent reward, which is regarded as the source of effective management, transformational control is seen as enriching that source for better leader effectiveness (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Leaders may be viewed as both transactional and transformational. Both styles of leadership place emphasis on the followers, where transactional leaders provide feedback about performance and transformational leaders attempt to involve followers with goal achievement (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Therefore, while most transactional leaders provide feedback regarding performance, exceptional leaders take part in transformational leadership behavior as well. Hence, the transformational behaviors improve the leader's effectiveness in addition to what the leader could gain only through transactional leadership. Even though transactional leadership results in expected performance, transformational leadership results in performance beyond expectations.

### ***Laissez-Fair Leadership***

Leaders who espouse a laissez-faire leadership type of behavior display a passive indifference towards their followers (Moss & Ritossa, 2007). The term laissez-faire means a philosophy or practice characterized by a usually deliberate abstention from direction or interference, especially with individual freedom of choice and action; in short, literally to "let people do as they please" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). As a result, laissez-faire leadership is based on trust. Laissez-faire leaders tend to move out from the leadership role and offer little direction or support to followers (Kirkbride, 2006). They avoid making decisions, give up responsibilities, and are indifferent to the needs of their

followers. In practice, this means leaders leave it up to their followers to complete responsibilities in a way they choose without direct policies or procedures. It is believed that laissez-faire is the passive avoidant and ineffective type of leadership theory.

Laissez-fair leadership does not provide positive or negative feedback, thus avoiding direct supervision, personal interaction, and interference. Therefore, people who enjoy a wide range of latitude in making decisions and working on projects autonomously are often most comfortable with laissez-faire leadership. On the other hand, this is the opposite for people who work well in a rigid environment with clear directions and routine goals. The vision of laissez-faire leadership would be, "Do what you want as long as get the job done right." Lending to the laissez-faire perspective, the key to success is to build a strong team and then stay out of their way ("What is laissez-faire leadership," 2018).

Characteristics of laissez-faire leadership include delegating authority to capable experts, maximizing the leadership qualities of the staff, praising accomplishments and rewarding successes, offering constructive criticism when necessary, allowing staff to solve problems and manage challenges, and knowing when to step in and lead during a crisis. These characteristics attract people who are self-starters, excel at individual tasks, and do not require ongoing feedback. For laissez-faire leadership to be successful, leaders must closely monitor group performance, employ highly skilled and well-educated staff, treat people as motivated self-starters, use the laissez-faire style only with experienced staff, and give consistent feedback ("What is laissez-faire leadership," 2018).

Negatively, laissez-faire tends to favor success-oriented people rather than those who solve more pressing issues. Therefore, if the team lacks sufficient skill or

motivation, the laissez-faire leadership style fails. The laissez-faire leader understands the failure as something resulting in a lack of accountability for organizations to achieve goals and a failure to properly advise and educate people, which leads to low performance and leads to ineffective time management by teams (“What is laissez-faire leadership,” 2018). On the other hand, laissez-faire leadership positively allows people to take responsibility for their achievements and failures, motivates people to perform optimally and make decisions, and reinforces successful performance that leads to retention.

### **Elements of Effective School Culture**

The first step in attaining an effective school culture is to help educators recognize that having a strong, positive culture means much more than just safety and order (Jerald, 2006). Schools that have a strong school culture are institutes where the students and teachers have a high motivation to learn and teach (Kalkan et al., 2020). That strong school culture also has a sincere and honest relationship among school members and a sense of collaboration (Kalkan et al., 2020). Therefore, the way teachers and administrators think and behave about sharing information about their practice is what produces a collaborative culture. A collaborative culture is the systematic process teachers and administrators use to work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact their professional practice in order to improve student achievement (Carpenter, 2014). The process of teachers and administrators to produce a collaborative culture must be interactive, whereby teachers and administrators utilize their expertise to share what they do in hopes of helping to improve the practice of others. For collaboration to be effective, people must perceive their skills, knowledge, and experience will be respected and their

contributions will be valued (Carpenter, 2014).

A positive school culture is focused on improving teaching and learning through collaboration to ensure all students achieve at high levels. The improvement of teaching and learning through collaboration requires teachers and administrators to systematically engage in an ongoing cycle of gathering data of current student performance levels. More of the aspects of a positive school culture are reflecting on past teaching and learning, developing strategies and innovative practices to ensure all students achieve, implementing the innovations, analyzing the impact of the innovations, and applying the new knowledge gained from the cycle to the next cycle of continuous improvement (Carpenter, 2014). The goal of a culture of continuous improvement is to create a collaborative environment for perpetual learning for students, teachers, and administrators (Carpenter, 2014).

Consequently, school culture can be determined by the values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of the various stakeholders within the school's community and reflects the school's social norms (Carpenter, 2014). School culture is directly impacted by the school leadership, who promotes the values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of the various stakeholders within the school community. Beliefs, values, and actions will spread the farthest and be tightly reinforced when everyone is communicating with everyone else. In a strong school culture, leaders communicate directly with teachers, administrators, counselors, and families, who also all communicate directly with each other (Shafer, 2018).

The word value is derived from the French word "valoin"; in English, it is "values," which means a valuable idea. Value is a belief about truth, goodness, and ideas

that serve as the basis of behavior in a community (Kholis, 2018). Values are what bring a community together even though it is made up of differences in ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, perspectives, and backgrounds. Shared values, or the judgments people at your school make about those beliefs and assumptions—whether they are right or wrong, good or bad, just, or unjust—make up the school culture (Shafer, 2018). Values are the binding that brings unity to the mission and vision of the school to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of school goals. Leadership that leads with integrity creates a culture with shared values while making decisions based on those shared values.

A good culture arises from messages that promote traits like collaboration, honesty, and hard work (Shafer, 2018). These traits translate into fundamental beliefs. Fundamental beliefs and assumptions have the power to influence school culture. Shared fundamental beliefs at the school are the things people consider to be true. To be effective, core beliefs and values must be monitored regularly by administration and supported by all staff in order to be sufficient.

Effective schools, however, suggest a clear, common “definition of the situation” for all individuals, sending a constant stream of clear signals to students and teachers about what their roles and responsibilities are (Jerald, 2006). Patterns and behaviors in a school directly have the power to influence the culture. Therefore, behavioral norms should be established to have a positive influence on the culture. Behavioral norms are defined as the way members believe they should behave or what they think is expected of them. Schools should focus on defining norms and expectations clearly to students and peers. Creating governance procedures that give teachers an active role in decision-making and ensuring that teachers can engage in meaningful professional development

focused on improving classroom instruction in the subjects they teach are known to be beneficial (Jerald, 2006). A truly positive school climate is characterized by the presence of a set of norms and values that focuses everyone's attention on what is most important and motivates them to work hard toward a common purpose (Jerald, 2006).

Stakeholders are anyone invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students. Stakeholders can include administration, teachers, staff, parents, students, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives. Therefore, using the word stakeholders indicates that they have a “stake” in the school and its students because they are personally, professionally, civically, or financially vested or concerned (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). Throughout this research, the terms stakeholder and school community are used interchangeably since the school community is made up of a variety of stakeholders.

Stakeholders are often used with the concept of reform, often specifically being used with school culture and the reformation. Stakeholders include leadership teams, shared leadership, and voice, and generally seek to expand the number of people involved in making important decisions related to a school's organization, operations, and academics. Shared leadership entails the creation of leadership roles and decision-making opportunities for teachers, staff members, students, parents, and community members, while voice refers to the degree to which schools include and act upon the values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of the people in their community (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). In addition, stakeholders may play a role in community-based learning. Community-based learning is the practice of

connecting what is being taught in school to its surrounding community, which may include history, literature, culture, local experts, institutions, and natural environments. To build school culture, community-based learning motivates the belief that all communities have intrinsic educational assets to enhance student learning, therefore providing that stakeholders are necessary to the educational process.

For the success of schools, stakeholders need to be involved in important decisions related to the governance, operation, or improvement of the school. Federal and state programs and grants are increasingly requiring the representation of diverse stakeholders, specifically from poverty-stricken communities or from groups that have historically been underserved by schools or have underperformed academically.

Stakeholder engagement is important to improve schools and school culture because research finds that many communities are uninformed about or disconnected from their local schools. By utilizing the general theory of including more members of the school community in the process, school leaders can foster a stronger school culture by ensuring that everyone has a sense of ownership. In other words, when the members of an organization or community feel their ideas and opinions are being heard and when they are given the opportunity to participate authentically in a planning or improvement process, they will feel more invested in the work and the achievement of its goals, which will increase the likelihood of success (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

Finally, in some cases, when schools make major organizational, programmatic, or instructional changes, particularly when parents and community members are not informed in advance or involved in the process, it can give rise to criticism, resistance, and even organized opposition. As a reform strategy to improve school culture, involving



a variety of stakeholders from the broader community can improve communication and public understanding while also incorporating the perspectives, experiences, and expertise of participating community members to improve reform proposals, strategies, or processes. In these cases, educators may use phrases such as “securing community support,” “building stakeholder buy-in,” or “fostering collective ownership” to describe efforts being made to involve community stakeholders in a planning and improvement process. In other cases, stakeholders are individuals who have power or influence in a community, and schools may be obligated, by law or social expectation, to keep certain parties informed about what is going on in the school and involved in its governance (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

### **Public Perception as it Relates to School Culture**

America for years has been disturbed by inherent anxieties about the direction of the country, including anxieties about issues concerning our public school system. Among these anxieties, of course, are the disparities of economic insecurity. In addition, the morality of the American culture seems to be decaying to higher crime, greed, lack of responsibility, and the breakdown of values. Consequently, many Americans are left to believe there is no reward for hard work and playing by the rules. This anxiety rolls over into education, in that Americans believe leadership from government, business, law, and ultimately education is out of touch with average Americans. This measure of anxiety leaves needs unmet and a lack of confidence in the system.

For the past 6 years, Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization that focuses on public policy issues, has conducted a series of national surveys and hundreds of focus groups on public education and school reform. The goal of

the Public Agenda is to understand what the general public and particular groups within the public, such as parents, teachers, school administrators, minority groups, and community leaders, think about public education and reform (“Where Americans stand,” 2019). What has emerged is a picture of an American public frustrated and angered by the state of public education. Some of the public's chief complaints about the schools reflect the societal themes: youngsters graduating without minimal basic skills, truants sporting diplomas alongside youngsters who worked hard, educators making jargon-laden announcements of yet another educational fad (“Where Americans stand,” 2019).

Employment trends in America tend to show declining wages of people without a strong educational background. It is quite concerning. Employers are finding now that many high school graduates applying for entry-level jobs immediately after high school are not capable of completing the application. People find this unsettling for any child; they find it terrifying for their own (“Where Americans stand,” 2019). At the same time, many Americans believe that the decaying morality of society is infecting the public school system.

As a result, many people fear that misbehaved students are getting more of the educator's attention, leaving students who want to learn without proper instruction. People expect that schools should teach academics, but it is America's reality that schools must teach other basic values. Society agrees that schools are obligated to teach good work habits like responsibility, being on time, and being disciplined; additionally, many people believe it to be essential for schools to teach the value of hard work (“Where Americans stand,” 2019).

As mentioned, the public believes that leaders, including educational reformers,

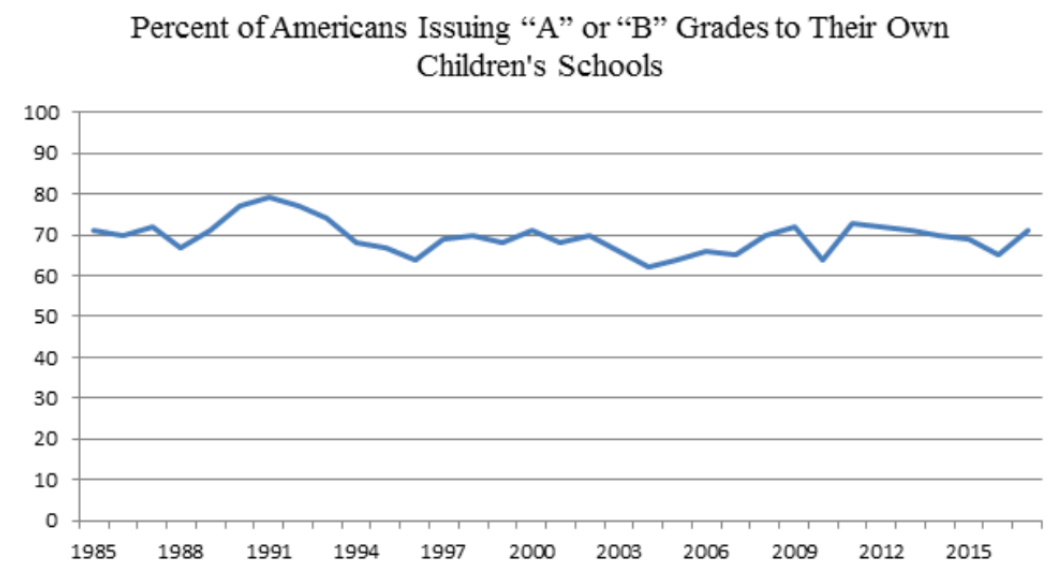
are out of touch with the thinking of average people. The public knows what they want from public education. All Americans from all walks of life seem to have the same vision of public education—safe, orderly schools where all children learn, at a minimum, basic skills. In the public's mind, until these tasks are accomplished, schools should not focus their attention elsewhere. Unfortunately, as they learn about local reform agendas, community members hear little that addresses their concerns (“Where Americans stand,” 2019). Right or wrong, the public feels that schools are no longer “theirs,” that they have been captured by the teachers, reformers, unions—whomever. As long as their concerns go unaddressed, public resistance will stiffen, ultimately leading citizens to abandon public education (“Where Americans stand,” 2019).

More recent research on the perception of public education still resorts to “American schools are failing” (Strauss, 2018, para. 2). Beginning with the Back to Basics movement of the 1970s and reaching a fever pitch with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, rhetoric about public school performance grew progressively more negative until it hit its stride during the No Child Left Behind era. Today, pessimistic policy talk is now so standard as to constitute a form of truth. The crisis in public education is seemingly self-evident (Strauss, 2018).

Moreover, each year, the Phi Delta Kappan poll asks Americans to rate the quality of their children’s schools. If, in fact, the quality of public education had declined year after year, parents would almost certainly have taken notice, yet the PDK poll indicates fairly consistent rates of satisfaction, with roughly 70% of parents giving their children’s schools an A or B grade each year the question has been asked (Strauss, 2018).

**Figure 2**

*Percent of Americans Issuing A or B Grades to Their Own Children's Schools*



*Note.* Grades chart. (PDK) (Jack Schneider/Brookings Institution).

Some have suggested that parents are underinformed about the performance of local schools. Research, however, indicates that parents have a strong sense of how their children are doing relative to peers in other schools. It seems, then, that abstract perceptions of public schools have suffered, while satisfaction with actual schools remains fairly consistent when parents are considered. Today, roughly one third of Americans have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the nation’s public schools, which is a massive decline from the early 1970s, when nearly two-thirds expressed such positive views. Meanwhile, nothing appears to have changed for the worse (Strauss, 2018).

With these profound data, what is causing the unease about public education? The decline in perception may be influenced by national reform language. For so many years, Americans have listened to various statements about a crisis in public education. A

Nation at Risk, President Bush speaking about No Child Left Behind, and even more recently Education Secretary Betsy DeVos all stated facts from the Program for International Student Assessment leading to highly interventionist reform efforts (Strauss, 2018). Every year, billions of federal and philanthropic dollars are channeled into school reform, and every president since George Bush has made education an administrative priority. Even though schools are not perfect, many schools do not need reforming. With that said, many require attention and investment, but sweeping a large reform over all schools is not the remedy for what is ailing most of the schools that need attention and investments. Unfortunately, the poorest and least advantaged students are often concentrated together with the large reforms, when it is not this disruption of reformation these schools need at all. Instead, what they need is courageous policy addressing issues like school integration and compensatory funding (Strauss, 2018).

Ultimately, the reality of America's schools differs from the perception that schools are performing well. The schools reflect our moral poverty as well as the nation's material prosperity (Strauss, 2018). These differences, unfortunately, are an example of the simultaneous embrace and refusal that education is offering, exposing who is included and who is not and draws to the fact that reformation is not the solution because our schools have not failed. The majority would argue that it is the lack of embrace by some that causes schools to appear as if they are failing but rather could be just as good as any school across the world. As a result, schools in our nation should reset and take total responsibility for rendering high-quality education. Americans, as a collective, must learn how to continue to embrace those for whom it works and learn different ways to render high-quality education for those who refuse. When a school fails, it is because

everyone failed (Strauss, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions in the study were

1. How does school leadership impact the school culture for all stakeholders?
2. How do teacher and staff beliefs about a positive school culture contribute to the school culture?
3. How does a positive school culture impact student academics, discipline, and attendance?

This study measured leadership as it relates to the school culture using the School Culture Triage Survey (Wagner, 2002; Appendix). The survey illuminated how teacher and staff beliefs contribute to the school culture. The school culture is impacted based on the variables, then the culture impacts student academics, discipline, and attendance.

This study will add to research on the impact of leadership on school culture that supports the claim that a positive school culture can increase staff morale and retention, student achievement, and stakeholder satisfaction. The study can address why school culture has suffered in certain schools and how the school leadership can be responsible.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to determine how leadership directly impacts effective positive school culture. Positive school culture is an essential component of a school's success for students, staff, and the community. I specifically addressed the following:

1. How does school leadership make sure the school has a positive culture for all stakeholders?

2. How do teacher and staff beliefs about a positive school culture contribute to the school culture?
3. How does a positive school culture impact student academics, discipline, and attendance?

To determine the leadership style that is effective in a positive school culture, I examined the history of leadership and the three most dominant leadership styles. In addition to this research, I surveyed staff in this small rural district to determine how the leadership within the schools added to this research. I used student academics, discipline, and attendance data from school report cards to determine how the school culture impacts these factors.

Leadership within a school is a process where the leader works with others towards a common goal of student success. Leaders can transpose their beliefs and values on the organization by their presence; hence, leaders need to be genuine when they are influencing, making this research especially relevant for leaders to study.

Leadership has the potential to be a positive influence on the functioning of a school; therefore, leaders must be cognizant of their own beliefs, values, and viewpoints. With this knowledge, it is evident that leadership is more than just a title because leaders add meaning by working with others. Leaders affect everyone in the school; consequently, they directly impact the belief system of the stakeholders. The vision of the leaders should be what brings meaning and connection from each person in the school to the school culture.

Within a school environment, the leader is usually the principal. The principal is usually the individual who promotes change that affects the school culture, whether

positive or negative. Therefore, principals must understand their role as they influence the school culture. I researched three dominant leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire.

In an effort to study effective positive school culture, I had to understand what effective positive school culture is. Positive school culture can be examined through the motivation of students and teachers to learn and teach through genuine relationships and collaboration. Furthermore, positive school culture can be determined by the values, beliefs, and behaviors of all shared stakeholders. The school administrator must communicate and work collaboratively with teachers, other administrators, counselors, and families; hence, a truly positive school culture is characterized by the presence of a clear set of norms and values that focus on what is important and motivation working towards a common purpose. Including all stakeholders for the success of the schools means constant involvement in decision-making, governance, operation, and improvement of the school, creating a sense of ownership. When members of the organization believe their ideas are being heard and they are given the opportunity to participate in the planning and improvement process, they will feel more invested and motivated to achieve a goal which will increase the likelihood of positive school culture.

This study was concluded by surveying the public to gain their perceptions of school culture in this small rural school district. I discovered how culture can be different from one side of the district to another based on school leadership. I categorize school leadership based on the three leadership styles in this study. I also compare school culture to school data and teacher perceptions of their working conditions.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this quantitative analysis to explore the impact of school leadership on school culture including the beliefs of teachers and staff interpreting how positive school culture affects student achievement, discipline, and attendance. This study approaches the question by doing a regression analysis of the leadership styles on various factors that are known to be impacted by leadership. The goal is to show that effective leadership is directly related to creating and maintaining a positive school culture. As a result of a positive school culture, certain outcomes will be evident such as teacher retention, increased community involvement, and increased student achievement.

### Research Questions

The research questions and hypotheses proposed in the study were

1. How does school leadership impact the school culture for all stakeholders?
  - H1. School leadership is positively related to school culture for all stakeholders.
2. How do teacher and staff beliefs about a positive school culture contribute to the school culture?
  - H2. When teachers and staff believe the school culture is positive, the school culture will reflect positivity.
3. How does a positive school culture impact student academics, discipline, and attendance?
  - H3. Once a positive school culture is established, student academics

increase, student discipline decreases, and student attendance increases.

This study measures the impact leadership has on the school culture using the School Culture Triage Survey (Wagner, 2002) as an independent variable based on affiliative collegiality and self-determination or efficacy. Opposite are the dependent variables that measure the school culture using the variable, professional collaboration, from the School Culture Triage Survey.

### **Study Type**

A quantitative study is appropriate to satisfy the goal of this study which was to examine the impact school leadership has on school culture measured by teacher retention, community involvement, and student achievement. Quantitative research methods are those methods in which numbers are used to explain findings (Techo, 2016). Quantitative research methods should be used in situations where the researcher wants to study how a specified variable affects another, disregarding the effects of other variables. Such a method is suitable in the sciences; consequently, quantitative methods have been used in the sciences for a long time compared to the other research methods (Creswell, 2003). The advantages of quantitative research methods are that they draw conclusions for large numbers of people, they employ efficient data analysis, they examine probable cause and effect, they control bias, and people generally like numbers. A quantitative research limitation is that it is impersonal; the participants are not heard. Also, there is limited understanding of the context of participants, and it is primarily research-driven (Creswell, 2003).

This study uses the HLM method and stepwise multiple regression. This quantitative method allows the three variables to be justified in each of the three

leadership types (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire), which are professional collaboration, affiliative and collegial relationships, and efficacy or self-determination (Wagner, 2002). HLM is a commonly used statistical method across many social science domains, specifically educational settings (Woltman et al., 2012). HLM is applicable when the observed variable in a study forms groups and the groups are randomly selected (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Data from the annual school report cards made available by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction were collected to study how leaders impact the school culture for all stakeholders.

HLM is a more complex form of ordinary least regression that is used to analyze variance in the outcome variables when the predictor variables are at varying hierarchical levels (Piotrowsky, 2016). Wagner's (2002) School Culture Triage Survey was used to evaluate the teacher variables in this model. This technique is intended to precisely estimate the lower-level slopes and the implementation on estimating the higher-level outcomes (Hofmann, 1997). The lower level would be the teacher level responses from the School Culture Triage Survey, and the higher level would be the school data retrieved from the school report card to establish the relationship of the variable to school leadership. Using this survey allowed the variables to be closely examined in this study.

HLM takes into consideration the impact of factors at their respective levels on an outcome of interest. It is the favored technique for analyzing hierarchical data because it shares the advantages of disaggregation and aggregation without introducing the same disadvantages. (Woltman et al., 2012, pp. 55-56)

Finally, HLM is ideal for analyzing nested data because it shows the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables by taking both Level 1 and Level 2 regression

relationships into account.

### **Participants**

The survey was distributed to all faculty at three middle schools. The participants in the survey were faculty from the three middle schools in a school district located in a small rural district in North Carolina: Middle School 1, Middle School 2, and Middle School 3. The participants were chosen based on their interest in the topic and willingness to participate in the study. There are approximately 142 total classroom teachers in these schools. The faculty who completed the survey are included in the participation and participation rate indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Teacher Participation Numbers and Rate*

School	Participation	Participation rate
Middle School 1	42	34.7%
Middle School 2	36	29.8%
Middle School 3	43	35.5%
Total	121	100%

*Note.* The table indicates the number of teachers who participated, and the participation rate is the number of teachers who participated per the number of teachers who were available at each school.

Middle School 1 consists of 645 students in Grades 6 through 8. The data taken from the school report cards are from the 2018-2019 school year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2018-2019 is the most current school report card data. Educators are still unsure of when the next testing cycle will take place to produce updated data. At the time of testing for the 2018-2019 school report card, the principal was in her second year at the school. This principal was also employed during the survey data collection in 2021.

All three schools offer an AVID program for applied students. Also, this school had a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) instructional program; however, it had not been nationally certified, and the program was discontinued during the 2018-2019 school year. The percentage of experienced teachers is 75%. In 2018-2019, Middle School 1 received a performance grade of 53, D. Academic growth was not met.

Middle School 2 consists of 956 students in Grades 6 through 8. At that time of testing for the 2018-2019 school report card, the principal had been at the school for 6 years, the most experienced principal of the three middle schools. This principal was also employed during the survey data collection in 2021. The percentage of experienced teachers is 77.2%. In 2018-2019, Middle School 2 received a performance grade of 59, C. Academic growth was met.

Middle School 3 consists of 670 students in Grades 6 through 8. At the time of testing, the principal had become principal of the school mid-year, January 2019. This principal received this promotion after being an assistant principal for 2.5 years. This principal was employed during the survey data collection in 2021. The percentage of experienced teachers is 68.5%. In 2018-2019, Middle School 3 received a performance grade of 50, D. Academic growth was not met.

### **Instruments Used to Collect Data**

The questions used to compose the dependent and independent variables were from the School Culture Triage Survey, as displayed in Tables 2 and 3. This School Culture Triage Survey was selected because it examines and compares multiple variables at one time.

**Table 2***Survey Questions Grouping by Independent Variables*

Independent variables	Affiliative collegiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.</li> <li>• Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each other's company.</li> <li>• Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.</li> <li>• Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.</li> <li>• Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.</li> <li>• There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment</li> </ul>
	Self-Determination/efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.</li> <li>• School members are interdependent and value each other.</li> <li>• Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.</li> <li>• Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.</li> <li>• The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.</li> <li>• People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.</li> </ul>

*Note.* Questions are grouped by independent variable on this table.

**Table 3***Survey Questions Grouping by Dependent Variables*

Dependent variable	Professional collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.</li> <li>• Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.</li> <li>• Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.</li> <li>• The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.</li> <li>• The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.</li> </ul>
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*Note.* Questions are grouped by dependent variables.

Although an older survey (Wagner, 2002), this survey was chosen because it can compare the multiple variables providing adequate testing of the research question, “Does school leadership impact the school culture for all stakeholders?” The comparative test included the impact of the following independent variables—affiliative collegiality and self-determination or efficacy—on the following dependent variable—professional collaboration.

### **Validity and Reliability**

School culture is characterized by the attitudes, values, beliefs, and rituals of the school community, including how people treat each other and the level of self-determination (Phillips & Wagner, 2009). School culture can be measured through a simple but transformative process called the School Culture Assessment (Phillips & Wagner, 2009). A primary needs assessment called the Triage Survey (Wagner, 2002) is used to determine the level of culture assessment that is required by the school or school district. In this time, school culture has become an even more important factor in

educational assessment and improvement efforts. The Triage Survey provides an accurate assessment of the health of a given school or school district. Like the medical field, triage is a term that describes the primary needs assessment based on a patient's three most important vital signs to determine the level of care that is required (Phillips & Wagner, 2009). The vital signs collected in the School Culture Triage Survey are professional collaboration, the presence of collegiality affiliation, and the degree of self-determination among school staff. The survey indicates the type and amount of care needed to support student achievement (Phillips & Wagner, 2009).

#### **Sources of Instruments and Permission**

The study was conducted using a 17-item Likert scale, the School Culture Triage Survey developed by Wagner (2002), analyzing school culture from three variables: professional collaboration (five items), affiliative collegiality (six items), and self-determination/efficacy (five items).

#### **Table 4**

*Cronbach's Alpha Factor Reliability for the School Culture Triage Survey Variables*

Professional collaboration:	0.91
Affiliative collegiality:	0.83
Self-Determination/efficacy:	0.82

*Note.* This table is organized by Cronbach's alpha factor reliability for the School Culture Triage Survey variables.

Cronbach's alpha factor reliability coefficient is a measure of internal consistency (Piotrowsky, 2016). Cronk (2010) explained it as several items that make up a scale designed to measure a single construct, and it determines if the degree to which all the items being measured are of the same construct. In addition, the strength of the reliability



of Cronbach's alpha is based on the value closer to 1.0 and weak when closer to 0.0 (Cronk, 2010). The variables in the School Culture Triage Survey are closer to 1.0, showing strong reliability.

### **Procedures Based on Research Question**

The survey was distributed via email using Google Forms to the associate superintendent of the school district who distributed the survey to the participating middle school principals. The middle school principals forwarded the survey to their faculty for completion. The survey was distributed at the end of April; data collection was completed during the second week of May 2021.

After data were collected from the survey and inputted into EXCEL software, statistical analysis was performed using JMP. JMP is an imputation to fill in any missing survey participation responses (Piotrowsky, 2016). This allowed the number of survey participation responses to be increased. The imputation is an accurate prediction of a specific missing data point from complete and incomplete data points.

Additional information inputted into the spreadsheet includes school data. Specifically, teacher qualification, teacher effectiveness, teacher retention, student achievement on the end-of-grade English/language arts and mathematics test, and student suspension. Teacher qualifications can be categorized by highly effective, effective, and needs improvement. This study included teacher effectiveness qualifications. Teacher effectiveness can be categorized by beginning teachers, provisional teachers, and experienced teachers. This study included teacher effectiveness by teacher experience. Student achievement included the student average proficiency rate across the three grade levels for the end-of-grade tests for English/language arts and math. Last, this study

examined the rate of suspensions across all grade levels for short-term and in-school suspension.

**Table 5**

*School Report Card Characteristics by School*

Schools	Teacher qualification	Teacher effectiveness	Teacher retention	EOG ELA	EOG math	Suspensions (rates by every 1,000 students)
Middle School 1	75%	68.6%	65.9%	49.7%	45.1%	938.18
Middle School 2	82.4%	50%	74%	53.0%	51.1%	871.85
Middle School 3	82.4%	57.1%	79.6%	49.4%	44.2%	1,600.59

**Data Analysis Method**

After all data points were collected, the data were inputted into an EXCEL spreadsheet. The first step in the data analysis was to run a principal component analysis (PCA). A PCA is used for extracting factors in factor analysis. The original variables are transformed into a new set of linear combinations by extracting the maximum variance for the data set with each component (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). A PCA was run for all the questions in the dependent and independent variables from the survey. The questions were entered according to their specific groups.

Once the PCA was run, the eigenvalue and Bartlett's test were examined to determine the number of existing factors. The eigenvalue is the amount of total variance explained by each factor (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). All factors over 1 were taken into consideration. Bartlett's test is a procedure that tests the null hypothesis when the

variables in the population correlation matrix are uncorrelated and used for factor analysis with small samples (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). To further reduce the number of factors identified by the PCA, the next step was to examine the scree plot. The scree plot is a graph of the magnitude of each eigenvalue placed on the vertical axis and plotted against their ordinal numbers on the horizontal axis (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). Three factors were observed based on the curve of the plot.

Upon completion of the exploratory analysis of the data, a factor analysis was run. A factor analysis is a mathematical model that results in the estimation of factors in contrast with the PCA (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). When running the factor analysis, three factors were used to determine the results. From this point, three new factors were determined and renamed. These three factors were still represented in the culture-dependent variable.

A factor analysis was also run on the independent variables of affiliative collegiality and self-determination or efficacy. The results were rotated the same as the dependent variable results.

The HLM was run using teacher-level variables as Level 1 (the dependent variable and the independent variables) and school-level variables as Level 2 (demographics, student performance; Piotrowsky, 2016).

Next, a stepwise multiple regression was run to determine the predictive nature of leadership on culture using the factors identified in the factor analysis. A stepwise multiple regression allows the ability to determine which specific independent variables make a meaningful contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable. A multiple regression identifies the best combination of predictors (independent variables) of the

dependent variable. It is used when there are several independent quantitative variables and one dependent variable (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010).

### **Timeline**

Table 6 indicates the time frame for collecting and analyzing the data from the survey along with the school data—teacher qualification, teacher effectiveness, teacher retention, student achievement on end-of-grade English/language arts and mathematics tests, and student suspension. Faculty at the three middle schools had 2 weeks in April 2021 to complete and submit the survey. Data were organized and prepared for analysis at the beginning of May 2021.

### **Table 6**

#### *Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis*

Month Year	Activity
May 2021	Distribution of the School Culture Survey
June 2021	Data analysis

*Note.* This table shows the month and year the surveys were administered to and completed by the participants. The month and year the data were analyzed are also listed.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the current study to include who participated in this study, how data were collected, and what these results mean for the research questions. In addition, the methodology and data analysis procedures were explained and supported with literature.

Chapter 4 presents the results of this study. The purpose of this study was to understand the effects of school leadership on school culture by examining teacher and staff beliefs on positive school culture and examining student academic achievement,

discipline, and attendance. The quantitative research methods used are the HLM and multiple regression. The data were collected using Wagner's (2002) School Culture Triage Survey and the school's North Carolina school report card.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from this study. The indirect effect of leadership and culture on student achievement, discipline, and attendance are examined in this chapter. Finally, recommendations for practice are offered as well as suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the study. The study's purpose was to determine the impact of leadership on school culture. The study answered the central question, "How does school leadership ensure a positive culture exists for all stakeholders?" The data for this study were collected using Wagner's (2002) School Culture Triage Survey (see Appendix) and the school's 2019 North Carolina school report card. The data from the survey were then downloaded into Microsoft Excel and transferred into JMP. Once in JMP, all analyses were run including the PCA, Bartlett's test, HLM, and stepwise multiple regression.

### Data Collection and Processing

The School Culture Triage Survey (Wagner, 2002) was distributed to the instructional staff of three middle schools in a small district in rural North Carolina. The survey was distributed to a total of 142 instructional staff; 121 responses were collected for a response rate of 85.2%. Instructional staff who completed the survey were required to complete all questions included in the Google Form. Table 7 is the response table.

**Table 7**

*Responses and Rates of Collected Survey Responses*

School	Responses from school	Percentages from school
Middle School 1	42	34.7%
Middle School 2	36	29.8%
Middle School 3	43	35.5%
Total	121	100%

## **Research Questions Answered With Statistical Support**

### ***Research Question 1: How Does School Leadership Impact the School Culture for All Stakeholders?***

Results from the multiple regression conducted in the study allowed me to conclude that all variables have a positive correlation, therefore suggesting that school leadership impacts school culture for all stakeholders.

**Stepwise Multiple Regression.** After running the HLM, the results showed no variance at the school level; all variance was demonstrated at the teacher level. Therefore, stepwise multiple regression would be used to analyze the data to answer the research questions. A stepwise multiple regression allows the researcher to determine which specific independent variables make a meaningful contribution to predicting the dependent variable (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). The first thing observed in the multiple regression models was the coefficient of determination of R square ( $R^2$ ), a number that indicates how well the data fit the statistical model on a line or curve. An  $R^2$  value of 1 means the regression line seamlessly fits the data points. An  $R^2$  value of 0 means that the regression line does not fit at all. A value close to 0 can be explained since the data are random (Frost, 2020). The next value that was observed was the p value. The p value helps determine the significance of the results. Hypothesis tests are used to test the validity of a claim about a population, which is called the null hypothesis (Frost, 2020). For the following multiple regressions, the p value used for analysis was  $p \leq 0.1$  due to the small sample size.

The stepwise multiple regression tested the effects of each variable in order. The first test conducted included professional collaboration as the dependent variable.

Suspensions, as a random variable, and affiliative collegiality and self-determination/efficacy, independent variables, were used. Results of the stepwise linear multiple regression suggested that suspensions are not a significant indicator of culture. The results of the stepwise regression revealed that all variables included in the School Culture Triage Survey are statistically important indicators of school culture. To better understand the results of the models and patterns of the relationship between leadership and culture at each school, one final exploratory analysis was done. A fit model regression plot graphed professional collaboration on the x-axis and the two independent variables plotted on the y-axis.

Figure 3 shows affiliative collegiality against professional collaboration for Middle School 1. In this graph, Middle School 1 shows as professional collaboration increases, affiliative collegiality increases.

### Figure 3

*Regression Plot for Middle School 1 Professional Collaboration v. Affiliative Collegiality*

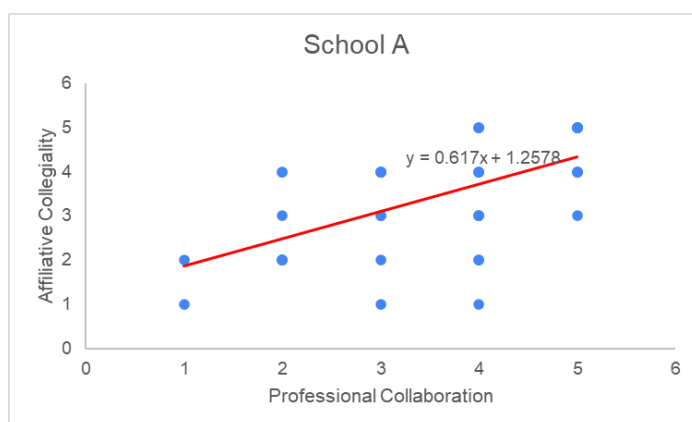


Figure 4 shows self-determination/efficacy against professional collaboration. In Figure 4, Middle School 1 shows a strong positive correlation, noted by the slope



(0.7263) between professional collaboration and self-determination/efficacy; as professional collaboration increases, self-determination/efficacy increases. When comparing the slopes for Middle School 1, the relationship between affiliative collegiality and self-determination/efficacy is a positive correlation (slopes: 0.617 v. 0.7263).

#### Figure 4

*Regression Plot for Middle School 1 Professional Collaboration v. Self-Determination/Efficacy*

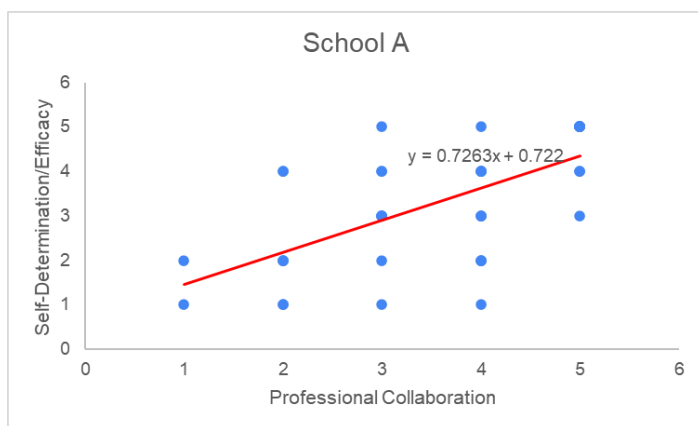
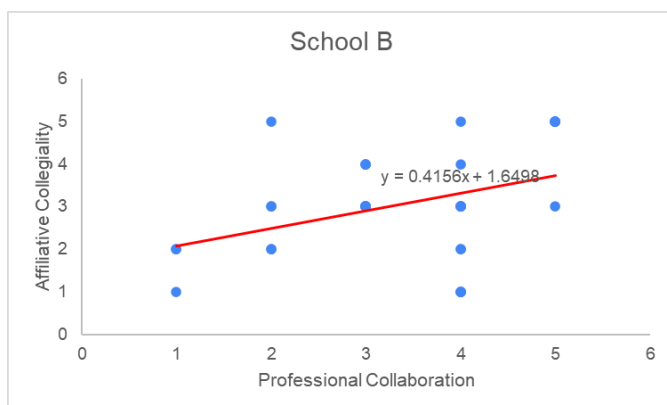


Figure 5 for Middle School 2 shows affiliative collegiality against professional collaboration. In Figure 5, Middle School 2 shows a positive correlation between professional collaboration and affiliative collegiality. Still, with a slope of 0.4156, it is not as strong as Middle School 1, which has a slope of 0.617. However, it is still positive, proving that school culture is positive.

**Figure 5**

*Regression Plot for Middle School 2 Professional Collaboration v. Affiliative Collegiality*



Still examining Middle School 2, Figure 6 examines self-determination/efficacy against professional collaboration showing a positive correlation between self-determination/ efficacy and professional collaboration; however, it is not as strong a positive correlation as seen in Middle School 1 when comparing slopes (0.7263 v. 0.5355). As professional collaboration increases, self-determination/efficacy increases. The slope comparison for Middle School 2 still proves that professional collaboration and self-determination/efficacy are more favorable than professional collaboration and affiliative collegiality, just as in Middle School 1.

**Figure 6**

*Regression Plot for Middle School 2 Professional Collaboration v. Self-Determination/Efficacy*

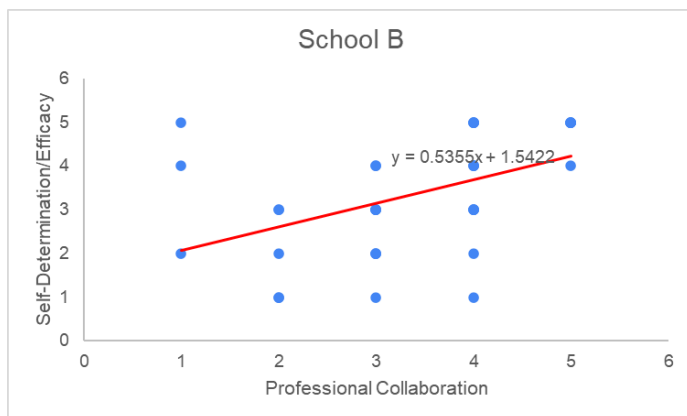


Figure 7 examines affiliative collegiality against professional collaboration for the third middle school, Middle School 3. Again, a positive correlation is not as strong a correlation as Middle School 1 and Middle School 2, with a slope of 0.3966. However, it still is positive, showing that as professional collaboration increases, affiliative collegiality increases.

**Figure 7**

*Regression Plot for Middle School 3 Professional Collaboration v. Affiliative Collegiality*

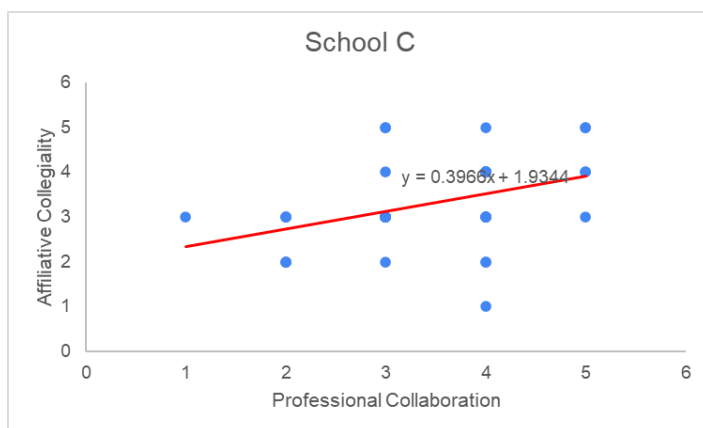
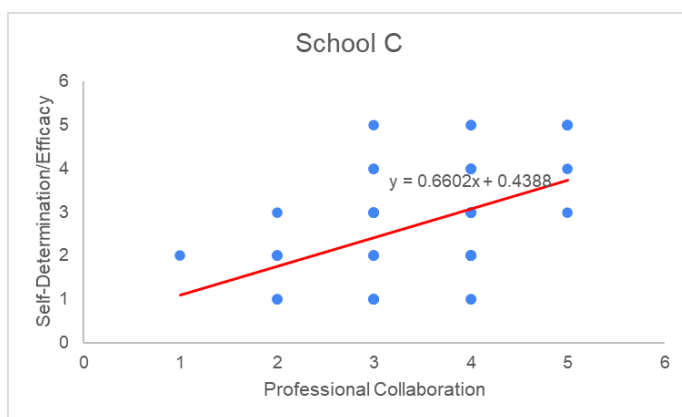


Figure 8 examines self-determination/efficacy against professional collaboration for Middle School 3 (slope of 0.6602). Again, a positive correlation is more robust than Middle School 2 (0.5355) but not as strong as Middle School 1 (0.7263). However, like the other schools, as professional collaboration increases, self-determination/efficacy increases. The regression plot can be examined in Figure 8.

### Figure 8

*Regression Plot for Middle School 3 Professional Collaboration v. Self-Determination/Efficacy*



In summary, all correlations for all schools are positive, proving that the relationship for school culture is positive.

**Research Question 1: Conceptual Framework.** Positive leadership predicts positive school culture, which is determined by values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of various stakeholders. The theoretical framework shows that positive shared culture leads to collaboration, improved teaching and learning, and achievement of goals. Prior studies have shown that leaders add to culture by the ideals or beliefs that are part of their cultural background (Schein, 2004). Remarkably, culture can take on the style of the leaders, so it is important for a leader to adopt a style that will lead to a positive school

culture, which is an environment that is cohesive between students and staff.

***Research Question 2: How Do Teacher and Staff Beliefs About a Positive School Culture Contribute to the School Culture?***

For the School Culture Triage Survey using a 17-item Likert scale with three variables (professional collaboration, five items; affiliative collegiality, six items, and self-determination/efficacy, five items), responses exude the teachers and staff beliefs about the school culture in this study.

**Table 8**

*Overall Percentage Score for Each Variable*

Variables	Percentage
Professional collaboration	52.88%
Affiliative collegiality	56.7%
Self-Determination/efficacy	54.8%

*Note.* Percentages indicated in this chart are above 50%, positively affecting school culture.

Table 8 gives the overall percentage of the scoring 4 or 5 of each variable's teacher and staff beliefs. The rates are above 50%, indicating that most teachers and staff believe professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy positively contribute to the school culture.

In addition, the variable self-determination/efficacy specifically denotes that individual teacher and staff beliefs about school culture contribute to the school culture. Additionally, this study, based on a percentage above 50%, indicates that they believe positive school culture contributes to the school culture positively.

**Research Question 2: Conceptual Framework.** The theoretical framework supports that when a leader produces a cohesive and collaborative environment, there is a clear sense of duty and purpose. Within a cohesive and collaborative environment, there is an opportunity for the leader to develop positive relationships with teachers and staff, which then can transfer into the different levels of the school, bringing positive results. Collaborative leadership has been shown to have a positive correlation to teacher efficacy (Arbabi & Mehdinezhad, 2015) and is an initial driver in school improvement (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Consequently, teacher efficacy and school improvement are directly correlated to the positive or negative effect of school leadership on the school culture which informs the beliefs of teachers and staff.

***Research Question 3: How Does a Positive School Culture Impact Student Academics, Discipline, and Attendance?***

According to the School Culture Triage Survey, professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy affect school culture, impacting student academics, discipline, and attendance. Below is a further statistical analysis proving that positive school culture impacts student academics, discipline, and attendance.

**Data Analysis–Independent Variables.** A PCA was run on both sets of questions for the dependent and independent variables. First, the PCA was run for the dependent variables. According to the results from the PCA, there were no differences in the factors identified by Wagner’s (2002) School Culture Triage Survey, so data analysis moved directly to the use of the factor analysis. The factor analysis for the dependent variable question set confirmed the groupings of the two variables of affiliative

collegiality and self-determination/efficacy. A factor analysis is a mathematical model created to estimate factors in contrast with the PCA (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010).

**Table 9***Factor Analysis of the Affiliative Collegiality and Self-Determination/Efficacy Variables*

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values	<b>0</b>	0.61
Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each other's company	<b>0.08</b>	0.15
Our school reflects a true "sense" of community	<b>0.08</b>	1.06
Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff	<b>0</b>	1.33
Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school	<b>0</b>	0.70
There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment	<b>0</b>	0.33
When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair	0.45	<b>0.15</b>
School members are interdependent and value each other	0.54	<b>0.27</b>
Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done	0.57	<b>0.18</b>
Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others	1.52	<b>0</b>
The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do	1.90	<b>0</b>
People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here	0.70	<b>0.08</b>

*Note.* This table shows the factor analysis to reduce many individual items into a fewer number of dimensions. The factors 0.4 or greater, bolded, have significant weight.



As seen in Table 9 the value in each bolded factor carries the weight of significance. Factors scoring close to 0 were considered significant for a factor score. The factor loading represents how questions were related to one another according to participant responses.

The second set of six questions of the School Culture Triage Survey were all contained initially in the affiliative collegiality section of the survey. Finally, the last six questions of the School Culture Triage Survey were all included in the self-determination/efficacy section of the survey. The factor analysis confirmed that the questions were grouped as designed by Wagner (2002). According to Cronbach's alpha factor reliability coefficient measured from Wagner, affiliative collegiality is second to highest at 0.83, and third highest is self-determination/efficacy at 0.82. Cronbach's alpha factor reliability coefficient is a measure of consistency. Strong reliability consists of measurements that are close to 1.0, and weaker ones are closer to 0.0 (Cronk, 2010).

**Data Analysis–Dependent Variables.** The process followed to analyze the independent variables is the same for the dependent variable. First, a PCA was conducted using the five questions that initially composed the dependent variable measuring professional collaboration, confirming the grouping designed by Wagner (2002). Additionally, Bartlett's test was conducted. Bartlett's test is a procedure that tests the null hypothesis that the variables in the population correlation matrix are uncorrelated and used for factor analysis with small samples (Mertler & Vannatta, 2010). The five groups, representing the five questions in this variable, were used to determine Bartlett's test. Bartlett's test was used with the significance level 0.04 to test the assumption that variance is equal across groups.

**Table 10***Data for Bartlett's Test Calculations*

Group	Sample size	Variance
1	121	1.363774
2	121	1.3
3	121	1.21832
4	121	1.235399
5	121	1.191322

*Note:* Table 10 shows the input data from the five questions of the variable, professional collaboration, to determine the results of Bartlett's test.

As a result of Bartlett's test, since the  $p$  value is more significant than the significance level, the null hypothesis of equal variance is accepted. Therefore, proving that the comparison of affiliative collegiality and self-determination/efficacy to professional collaboration is accepted.

**Research Question 3: Conceptual Framework.** The theoretical framework emphasizes that beliefs affect the school culture, and the school culture impacts student academics, discipline, and attendance. The opportunity to improve school culture is supported by the direct impact of the school leadership, based on their prominent leadership style. Teachers are the most affected stakeholders; therefore, the leadership style adopted should promote teachers taking more control over key school-wide and classroom decisions, leading to less student misbehavior and more cooperation among teachers and school leaders; thereby resulting in committed and engaged teachers, improved community engagement, and a positive effect on student achievement.

### **Results of the HLM**

The next step in the data analysis is the HLM. The HLM was run using teacher-

level variables as Level 1 (professional collaboration as the dependent variable and affiliative collegiality and self-determination/efficacy as the independent variables) and school-level variables as Level 2 (demographics and student performance). The reason the HLM was selected is this method allows for nested data. Since the data are from three different schools, it was assumed that teachers would be nested by the school. Initially, as previously discussed, it was projected to include all the dependent, independent, and school-related factors in the model; however, this was not possible because of the small school sample sizes. Therefore, when computing the HLM, only one school-level variable was included in Level 2. The Level 1 variables included all the independent and dependent variables measuring school culture. In Level 2, only one school measure was included (suspensions) because there would not have been sufficient degrees of freedom to run the model with all school-level factors. Suspensions were set as random to run the HLM.

After examining the results of the HLM, it was determined that the independent variables explained 8.5% of the variance in culture–affiliative collegiality. No probability test was calculated because all the variance was explained in the residual. In Level 2, 0% was defined by the school-level factor. A finding at 100% of residual suggests that all the effects were at the teaching level.

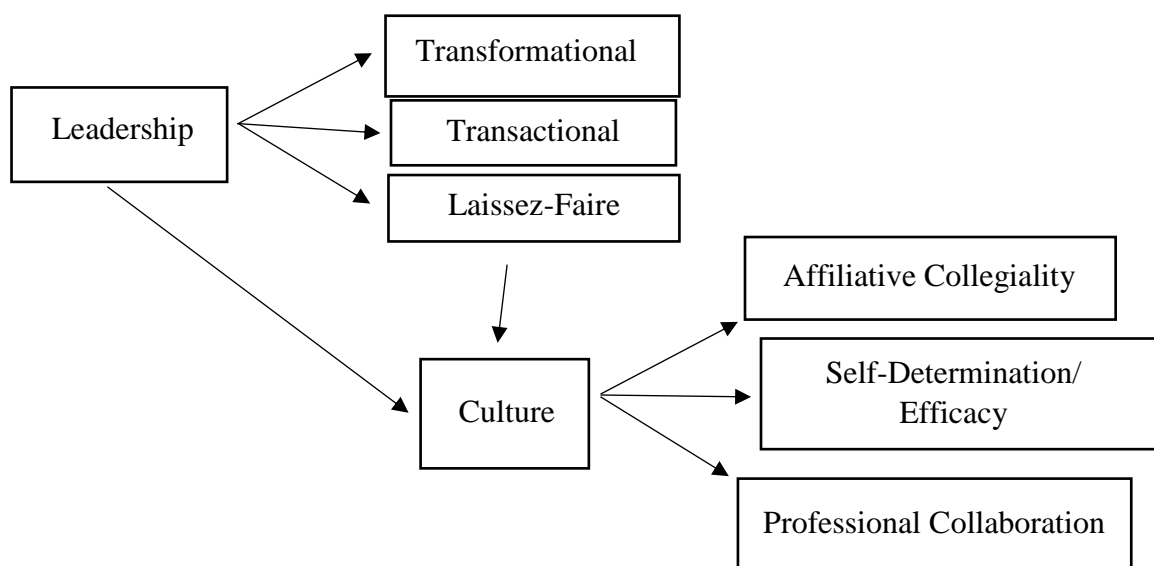
Next, examining the results of the next HLM, the independent variables were found to be 7.3% of the variance in culture–self-determination/efficacy. Again, suspensions were used as a random variable. Same with the first HLM, the probability test was not calculated because nearly all the variation in responses in the model was found to exist at the teacher level.

Finally, examining the results of the HLM, the dependent variables were found to be 5.1% of the variance in culture–professional collaboration. Again, suspensions were used as a random variable; and same as the other variables, all variations in responses in the model were found to exist at the teacher level.

Since the teachers were nested within the schools, the decision to use the HLM was chosen with the anticipation of accounting for a higher variance. However, the results show that none of the variances were explained at the school level; all fell at the teacher level. This lack of clarity was due to schools reporting transformational leadership as the primary style of all three principals, leaving no variance at the school level. This caused groups to be eliminated in this model, determining that HLM was not the appropriate method to answer the research questions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The PCA and factor analysis helped in renaming the culture variables in the theoretical framework. The redesigned theoretical framework reflects the variables used in the School Culture Triage Survey: affiliative collegiality, self-determination/efficacy, and professional collaboration. The leadership component remained the same as the original framework. Figure 9 illustrates the revised theoretical framework.

**Figure 9***Revised Theoretical Framework*

The opportunity to improve school culture lies within the direct effect of school leadership. School leadership that centers on the leader’s ability to promote professional collaboration, self-determination/efficacy, and affiliative collegiality positively impacts school culture.

**Conclusion**

This chapter included findings from multiple analyses conducted in the study to answer the research questions. To define culture in the theoretical framework, I renamed the variables after the variables in the School Triage Survey—professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy. After running the HLM, it was found that nearly all the variance was being explained by the residual or teacher level and not the school. As such, stepwise multiple regression was selected as a more appropriate method of analysis. Results from the stepwise multiple regression suggest that

suspension, a random variable, was not a significant factor in predicting culture for schools. Using one final analysis method, a regression plot, the relationship of the variables in the School Culture Triage Survey was plotted for the three middle schools using professional collaboration as the independent variable and the other two as dependent variables, affiliative collegiality and self-determination/efficacy.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of leadership on school culture. This chapter includes a discussion of findings from the survey. Results of this study are situated in the existing literature. Using a post hoc test, the indirect effect of leadership on school culture is examined in this chapter. Finally, practice recommendations are offered as well as suggestions for future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

The research questions posed in this study were how school leadership impacts the school culture for all stakeholders, how teacher and staff beliefs about a positive school culture contribute to the school culture, and how a positive school culture impacts student academics, discipline, and attendance. As described in the literature review, there was an ongoing call for improved outcomes for students, resulting in new leadership models in schools; therefore, the culture was identified as a school improvement strategy. Positive school culture is focused on improving teaching and learning through collaboration to ensure all students achieve at high levels. The improvement of teaching and learning through collaboration requires teachers and administrators to systematically engage in an ongoing cycle of gathering current student performance levels.

Based on the literature review, a theoretical framework was created and used to write the research question hypotheses. Data for the study were collected from three middle schools in one small, rural school district in North Carolina. In these three schools, 142 teachers were asked to complete the 17-item Likert scale School Culture Triage Survey by Wagner (2002). Data analysis included PCA, factor analysis, HLM, and

stepwise multiple regression. The PCA and factor analysis of the independent and dependent variables resulted in no change in those variables. Due to the lack of difference in those variables, a new theoretical framework was developed. To support the change in the theoretical framework, I renamed these variables the defining variables of school culture—professional collaboration, affiliative collegiality, and self-determination/efficacy.

With the confirmed independent and dependent variables, data analysis continued with the HLM; however, the small sample size coupled with the finding that all variation in responses were found at the teacher level, it was concluded that a more appropriate analysis method was required. As such, a stepwise linear regression was calculated. Results are reviewed by being situated in the literature base.

As noted by Deal and Peterson (2009), the culture of an organization can impact performance. Deal and Petersen drew assessments between the literature on school culture and effective schools and concluded that effective organizations have a strong culture with shared ways and values of how things are done; leaders who embody core values; widely shared beliefs about the mission; employees who represent core values; ceremonies, traditions, and rituals centered on events; balance between innovation and tradition, autonomy and authority; and employee participation in decisions about their work.

Since teachers are identified as the essential school-level resource, teachers tend to predict student achievement. Improving culture by clearly stating a mission for the school and allowing teachers to interact with one another to improve their skills and take ownership of programs to achieve the school's mission is seen as an important strategy to



improve schools. The results from this study suggested that leadership does predict school culture. To situate the findings in the current literature, a brief review of the relationship between culture and student achievement is offered.

### **Student Achievement**

Wilhem (2016) stressed the effect of collaborative leadership on student achievement: “shared leadership empowers teacher leaders to begin, side-by-side with the principal, to shoulder the responsibilities for significant work toward improving student achievement, through the process of the principal’s modeling, co-planning, co-facilitating, and debriefing leadership experiences” (p. 26). In addition, my research states there is a significant relationship between a school’s traditional culture and learning style with student academic performance.

A sustained relationship of leadership to student achievement is by effective school leadership, which strengthens student achievement.

Leaders are almost always responsible for improving the technical core of their organizations’ work; in the case of school leaders, an unrelenting demand to focus on improving the achievement of all students make contemporary school leaders’ attention to instructional quality the highest priority for their work. (Leithwood & Sun, 2012, p. 440)

In addition, establishing collaborative working relations between administrators and teachers and nurturing teacher-teacher relationships through the support of PLCs effectively close the achievement gap for learners.

In summary, most of the impact a school has on its student achievement is the direct result of an effort by school leaders and teachers. Of that, much of the school’s

academic achievement depends solely on the school leader's actions. This means a single person can determine a portion of a school's overall impact on students.

### **Post Hoc Test**

Based on the literature review of culture and student achievement, a post hoc test was conducted to determine the relationship of culture with student achievement in the study district to conclude practice and future research. The raw data from excel were analyzed based on the responses from the School Culture Triage Survey. Answers from the survey were on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree for each question.

The question responses were averaged for each of the variables for each school. In Table 11, the questions are grouped by variable.

**Table 11***Questions by Variables*


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Professional collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.</li> <li>• Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.</li> <li>• Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process concerning materials and resources.</li> <li>• The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.</li> <li>• The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than separate individuals.</li> </ul>
Affiliative collegiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values.</li> <li>• Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each other's company.</li> <li>• Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.</li> <li>• Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff?</li> <li>• Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.</li> <li>• There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.</li> </ul>
Self-Determination/efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.</li> <li>• School members are interdependent and value each other.</li> <li>• Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.</li> <li>• Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.</li> <li>• The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.</li> <li>• People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.</li> </ul>

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In Table 12, the question responses were averaged and then grouped by school

and school-level factors.

**Table 12**

*Question Response Averages*

	Middle School 1	Middle School 2	Middle School 3
Professional collaboration	3.6	3.39	3.45
Affiliative collegiality	3.55	3.33	3.28
Self-Determination/ efficacy	3.5	3.29	2.78
Suspensions (rates by every 1,000 students)	938.18	871.85	1600.59
EOG ELA	49.7	53.0	49.4
EOG math	45.1	51.1	44.2

To summarize the results from the original analysis, the variables were statistically significant for school culture. According to the HLM, results found no variance was explained at the school level but was at the teacher level. According to the data in Table 12, differences exist mainly with Middle School 2 with suspensions and EOGs for English language arts and math. In examining the data in Table 12, it is essential to remember that the principals were employed for less than 2 years at Middle School 1 and Middle School 3 when report card data were collected, which could be the reason for the differences compared to the other middle school.

To further understand the data in the post hoc test, a Pearson correlation was done. A Pearson correlation is the appropriate measure of correlation when variables are expressed as scores. Findings from the Pearson correlation added to the understanding of the relationship between leadership and culture and the relationship between culture and suspension and culture and student achievement. Further, the Pearson correlations confirmed other findings.

A negative correlation was found between suspension and test scores ( $r = -0.51$ );

the relationship was not statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.04$ . This indicates that as suspensions increase, the test scores would decrease.

Results from the study suggest that school leaders have done an excellent job setting direction and obtaining consensus from stakeholders on the mission of schools but that work needs to be done on building a culture of collaborative leadership. Strategies to accomplish this would include involving teachers in decision-making in the building, increasing time for planning, and facilitating relationships built upon trust.

In summary, leadership predicts culture; culture predicts student discipline and student achievement. It is simply that sustained, effective school leadership substantially strengthens student achievement.

### **Implications of Findings**

In terms of practice, results of this study suggest that the most critical behavior of a leader, as described by Herold and Fedor (2008), is that a school leader must practice careful entry into a new setting by listening to and learning from those who have been in the educational background longer. While the school leaders are in the process of listening and learning, they must engage in fact-finding and joint problem-solving while addressing people's concerns. School leaders must be enthusiastic, genuine, and sincere about the change in circumstances to obtain buy-in for what needs fixing and develop a credible plan for making that fix (Fullan, 2010, p. 18).

As defined by the survey, professional collaboration included working together through discussion, clearly communicating, and involving teachers and staff in the decision-making process through collaboration and consensus. We know that shared purpose, values, and mission matters, although not explicitly addressed in this survey. In

schools, including the three middle schools in this study, school leaders need to focus on valuing teacher ideas, trusting the professional judgment of teachers, praising teachers who perform well, involving teachers in decision-making, facilitating teachers working together, keeping teachers informed about current issues, rewarding teachers for experimenting with new ideas and techniques, supporting risk-taking and innovation in teaching, and protecting instruction and planning time.

### **Limitations of Findings**

As previously noted, the limitation of the current study was the sample size. The study must be repeated in a larger school district containing more schools to analyze the data using HLM. In this manner, it would be more likely to find differences across schools. Using HLM to study the relationship between school leadership and school culture could help other researchers better explain the relationship between these two constructs of nested variables. It is also important to note that the results from this study are not generalizable; they are representative of this small district in rural North Carolina. Overwhelmingly, teachers in the district defined culture as professional collaboration. Their responses revealed similar patterns in answering questions focused on collaboration, problem-solving, support for one another, and communication. Absent from the survey questions about culture were questions about professional development and creating a culture of improvement focused on the instructional process. Different definitions of culture could lead to additional findings regarding the importance of leadership and creating a positive culture.

A larger sample would also eliminate the bias resulting from the leadership length of time in two middle schools. It is important to recall that the principal in Middle School

1 was in Year 2 as principal and the principal in Middle School 3 was in their first year as principal, starting mid-year.

### **Future Study Moving Forward**

To expand this study, I would suggest taking a larger sample size, using more schools to eliminate bias that may become more evident for a cause like what may have been seen in my study. When conducting quantitative research, the more data collected illuminates more effective results, specifically when using the HLM. Allowing for a large sample size would allow for more generalization of how school leaders affect school culture.

Additionally, adding demographics to school-level factors will allow another layer of understanding school culture to give more general results of how school leaders affect school culture. Also, teacher retention would be another school-level factor to consider when understanding how school leaders affect school culture. Both school-level factors will bring further insight, primarily when a larger sample size is studied.

### **Conclusion**

Study results were situated in the literature to inform findings. The research questions were answered using results from multiple methods supported and confirmed by the literature.

1. How does school leadership impact the school culture for all stakeholders?
2. How do teacher and staff beliefs about a positive school culture contribute to the school culture?
3. How does a positive school culture impact student academics, discipline, and attendance?

As a result of the study's findings, a new theoretical framework for how leadership impacts culture was proposed. Professional collaboration was the leading variable found to be a predictor of culture in the analysis conducted in the study; one final post hoc analysis was performed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics confirmed the relationship between leadership, culture, and student achievement.

The culture was introduced as a factor that impacts the satisfaction of school stakeholders; therefore, how school leadership affects culture is significant. Teacher and staff beliefs about school culture contribute to the school culture, thereby adding to whether this all impacts the academics, discipline, and attendance of students. The goal is to show that effective leadership is directly related to creating and maintaining a positive school culture.

Therefore, the results of my study in this small, rural school district in North Carolina confirm my hypothesis: School leadership is positively related to school culture for all stakeholders. Also, when teachers and staff believe the school culture is positive, the school culture will reflect positivity. Once a positive school culture is established, student academics increase, student discipline decreases, and student attendance increases.



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**Appendix**  
**School Culture Triage Survey**

# *Center for Improving School Culture*

## **CREATING BETTER PLACES TO LEARN**

### **SCHOOL CULTURE TRIAGE SURVEY**

**Directions:** Please circle a number to the right of each statement that most closely characterizes the practice in your school.

Rating: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always or Almost Always

#### **Professional Collaboration**

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |

#### **Affiliative Collegiality**

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 2. Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company.      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 3. Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 4. Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff?    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 5. Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5   |   |   |   |   |
| 6. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations including holidays, special |   |   |   |   |

events, and recognition of goal attainment.	1	2	3	4
5				

### **Self-Determination/Efficacy**

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. School members are interdependent and value each other.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |