THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ASSISTANT

PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

José Lauro Dávalos

May 2013

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my wife, Amanda. Thank you for being a great support and for understanding me, especially when we were away. I hope this work bears fruit for our family in the years to come. Your hard work and dedication served as an example for me to follow as I worked on my thesis.

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I would like to thank Dr. MacNeil, Dr. Busch, and Dr. Emerson. I have learned many things from you three through the Master's and Doctoral program. Every lecture and discussion was full of great practical advice for our careers. Thank you for coordinating this program in a way that allows educators the opportunity to make this endeavor a reality.

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Abstract

Educators across the country understand that our educational system must improve in the near future in order to keep pace with other countries around the world and provide students with the appropriate opportunities for success. We must look at our leadership practices and reflect on how we can improve them to positively affect schools. This study specifically analyzed what assistant principals do to create effective professional relationships with teachers. The quality of the relationships between teachers and principals is a key factor in achieving trust, cooperation, and open communication which lead to higher staff morale (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Higher staff morale could lead to greater efficacy that could translate to increased student achievement.

This study analyzed the responses from 361 assistant principals when asked the following questions: (1) Why is the relationship between the principal and the teacher important for the school? (2) What is the most critical feature for a successful working relationship between the teacher and the principal? (3) What does a principal do to create good relationships with their teachers? And (4) how does the principal look out for the welfare of their teachers?

The results of this study indicated that assistant principals perceive communication, leadership and support, and trust and respect as the most important characteristics in building and maintain positive working relationships with teachers.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Education has been increasingly in the minds of legislators, politicians, interest groups, and educators who wish to reform our current educational system. The phrase "education reform" resonates across the country. Federal and state programs calling for higher accountability in terms of test scores have increased pressure on educators to close the achievement gap that plagues our American educational system. In spite of the increased pressure, school funding has taken a drastic shortfall, causing the layoffs of many teachers and the cutting of educational programs. The loss of funding may not be helping our students, but it must not be used as an excuse for diminished educational opportunities for our youth. Educators must find solutions to tackle the pressing problems that our country's educational system is facing.

An area that has been studied in hopes of reversing the current trend in our education system is the effect that educational leadership has on student learning. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2005) have identified 21 leadership behaviors that have statistically significant relationships to student achievement. Developing procedures where teachers have input in the design and implementation of important policy decisions is one way shown to increase student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2005). Improving the school culture by encouraging a set of shared beliefs and developing a feeling of community and cooperation is another leadership responsibility that has statistical significance in its effects on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2005).

Assistant principals are part of the leadership team of schools and their role could play a significant part in the implementation of the aforementioned strategies. A review of the AP duties of the last few decades showed that the three themes that emerged were student discipline, instructional leadership, and personnel management (Oleszewsky, Shoho, & Barnett 2012). The way assistant principals approach personnel management could play a pivotal role in improving the school culture, which is an area that has been identified as having a positive effect on student achievement in school. However, the role or position of the assistant principal is an area that has received very little attention (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Researchers point out that the assistant principal role has been categorized as a forgotten role and a wasted educational resource in schools (Glanz, 1994; Havery, 1994).

This study looked closely at the importance of the relationships between teachers and assistant principals. Assistant principals were interviewed on the importance of the relationships and what they do to create positive working relationships with teachers.

Education Reform

The National Alliance of Black School Educators has declared that a quality education is a civil right that must be offered to every student regardless of race, socio-economic status, or national origin (Fryer, 2010). The sense of urgency to improve our education system arises from many issues affecting education including statistics that show an alarming disparity between the achievement of minorities and whites. The gap is so profound that minority students in the United States score approximately equal to the national scores of Mexico and Turkey— two of the lowest performing countries

according to the organization for economic cooperation and development (Fryer, 2010).

Over the course of the last few decades, many programs have been implemented,

assessed, and abandoned. Studies analyzing teachers, principals, and many instructional

programs have been carried out in hopes of finding solutions to the pressing problems

facing our current system. An area that has not received much attention is importance

of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. This study analyzed the

importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers and what

assistant principals did to create good professional relationships with them. This

information was gathered from the perspective of the assistant principals.

The pressure to successfully improve the American education system continues

to mount. Additional data shows that results from the *Trends in International*

Mathematics and Science Study revealed that the United States is falling behind other

nations in terms of science and mathematics test scores (TIMMS, 2007). Federal and

state programs such as Race to the Top encourage states to adopt tougher accountability

measures that tie teacher performance to high stakes tests in hopes of reversing trends

such as those published by the TIMMS (US Department of Education). The No Child

Left Behind Law has also increased the pressure on school systems across the nation to

produce better results as determined by standardized testing. By 2014, the goal of

NCLB is to have one hundred percent of students score on grade level on state

administered standardized exams. This elusive goal has placed a tremendous amount of

pressure on educators across the country as they strive to adequately prepare students to

meet the challenges of this law.

In light of all of the increased testing and accountability measures dictated by federal and state policies, test scores have not significantly increased across American schools. Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that scores in mathematics were improving significantly until 2003. After 2003, the gains have been significant, but smaller than pre-NCLB years (Ravitch, 2011). The achievement gap between Caucasian and Asian students compared to Hispanic and African American students is still alarming. In addition, there are hundreds of failing schools located in poor urban neighborhoods across the country. In 2007, the national graduation rate for students was a dismal sixty-nine percent (Swanson, 2010). The implications for low graduation rates are tremendous. Those without a diploma are faced with reduced opportunities in this unstable economy. Furthermore, high school dropouts are also more likely to be dependent on government welfare programs and contribute less to our economy than their graduating peers. A particularly troubling and well known statistic is that the majority of non-graduates are members of traditionally disadvantaged minorities that come from neighborhoods facing harsh poverty rates and economic hardship. As educators continue to work in schools in this present context, it is imperative that they persist in their quest to improve our education system one student at a time.

The notion that our American educational system must improve is shared by many educators across the country. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, the pressure to reform and improve our schools has been mounting (Kosar, 2005). In spite of the fact that many programs have been

designed, evaluated, and implemented, the results of national exams that compare American students to other countries reveal that we must do better (Kosar, 2005).

Reform to our educational system has come from all angles. States have developed their own accountability programs as has the federal government. In 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act. This federal policy required states and local education agencies to provide easily understood information on student and school performance. The data reported had to be broken down by a multitude of categories that compared students from diverse backgrounds (Kosar, 2005). This requirement exposed many problems in our system including the achievement gap between students from diverse backgrounds.

As a result many new programs and ideas have been implemented in the hopes of closing the achievement gap and raising student achievement across the country. An area that has been looked at closely has been school leadership. Many studies have examined the effects of school leadership and its relation to student achievement. According to research, leadership skills have significant statistical correlation to achievement gains in students (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2005). The effects of leadership behavior, particularly the behavior of assistant principals and teachers, were explored in the literature review.

The current state of the American education system has prompted educators to develop solutions to improve our current picture. One idea that has garnered momentum is offering students more choices as it pertains to which schools they attend. The Programme for International Student Assessment stated the following:

PISA shows…that two students with the same family characteristics going to different schools—one with higher and one with lower socio-economic profile—could expect to be further apart in reading literacy than two students from different backgrounds going to the same school (Fullan, 1997)

This idea has resonated with politicians and some education leaders as the movement to increase the number of successful charter schools is under way. The call for more charter schools was epitomized by *Waiting for Superman*. In this documentary, the directors hint towards charter schools as the solution for many problems facing students in inner city schools. However, in general, charter schools do not perform significantly better than the traditional public schools. There are many high performing charter schools as well as underperforming ones.

The importance of having highly effective teachers and its correlation to student achievement has been an area that many educators have emphasized in recent years (McRel, 2003). In the same way, highly effective school principals have been linked with the overall success of particular schools (McRel, 2003). It is important to retain highly effective teachers and principals no matter where the schools are located.

Over the course of the last few decades, many programs have been implemented, assessed, and abandoned. Studies analyzing teachers, principals, and many instructional programs have been carried out in hopes of finding solutions to our pressing problems facing our current system. An area that has not received much attention is importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers.

This study examined the perceived importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers and what assistant principals did to create good professional relationships with teachers. This information was gathered from the perspective of the assistant principals.

Statement of the Problem

The school principal plays a direct role in shaping the school climate (Price, 2011). In school environments where trust, cooperation, and open communication are encouraged, principals tend to have more influence over the organizational climate of schools (Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharrat, 1998). Trust, cooperation, and open communication have also been correlated to an increase of staff morale (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). The quality of the relationships between teachers and principals is a key factor in achieving trust, cooperation, and open communication, which lead to higher staff morale (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). In addition, having highly effective teachers correlates to student achievement (McRel, 2003). Even though a vast collection of studies has been done in the two mentioned topics, little research has been conducted on the role that the assistant principal plays on the success of schools.

There are few other topics that are less discussed in professional journals that focus on school leadership than the topic of assistant principals (Weller & Weller, 2002). The assistant principal could potentially play a vital role in our schools. Assistant principals conduct a variety of duties that contribute to the overall functioning of the school. Oleszewsky, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) discussed that one of the emerging themes arising from a survey of multiple studies carried out on the duties of the assistant principal revealed that assistant principals spend a significant amount of

time on personnel management. Assistant principals spend more time with teachers and students than the principal. Their ability to assist in creating and nurturing positive relationships with teachers has the potential to affect the overall functioning of successful schools. In secondary schools, the assistant principals are more likely to spend time in the classroom evaluating teacher performance than the school principal. They are also more likely to work closely with specific department and grade levels. It is crucial to form positive working relationships in order to maintain a healthy school climate and a cohesive staff; therefore, it is important to analyze the beliefs about assistant principals in the way they form relationships with teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this study is to analyze the importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. More research needs to be done on this topic since teachers and assistant principals play a vital role in the overall functioning of a school. Having positive relationships between teachers and the leadership team of schools is important in order to preserve teacher satisfaction and increase morale (Robert, 1976). The ultimate goal of educators should be to increase student achievement, especially among students from different socioeconomic statuses and ethnicities. Having high teacher satisfaction in their jobs could be an integral component of achieving this in our schools. A great way to increase teacher satisfaction could be by working on creating and maintaining positive professional relationships between assistant principals and teachers.

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant because it will provide information on the perceived importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. This study will add to the limited knowledge base of assistant principals. It will provide information on what assistant principals perceive as the most critical aspects of successful working relationships with teachers as well as what they do to improve those relationships. The significance of the research completed in this study will be in informing principal preparation programs of the assistant principal's view of the importance of the relationships between teachers and assistant principals. Much research has been conducted about school leadership; however, the role of the assistant principal often receives inadequate representation in education journals. Since a significant portion of the daily routine of assistant principals is spent on personnel management, it is important to consider what assistant principals are doing to foster collaboration and productive relationships with teachers (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett 2012).

Research Questions

This study will focus on the four questions that explore the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. The questions are as follows:

1. Why is the relationship between teachers and assistant principals important for the school?

2. What are the most critical features for a successful working relationship between teachers and assistant principals?

3. What do assistant principals do to create good professional relationships with teachers?

4. How do assistant principals look out for the personal welfare of their teachers?

A total of 361 active assistant were surveyed on these four questions. Their responses will give assistant principals a clear voice about their perception of the importance of relationships. This information can be used to inform principal preparation programs and professional development opportunities for practicing assistant principals.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Leadership

School leadership is an area of education that has been thoroughly studied.
There are many leadership theories that describe a plethora of different leadership
styles. Waller and Waller (2002) describe the behavioral theory that states that three of
the most common leadership descriptors are autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire.
The autocratic leader expects compliance based on the power derived from the
hierarchy of the organization and may use threats and consequences to achieve the goals
of the institution. Democratic leaders are those who choose to delegate authority to
subordinates. They are more likely to support team decisions and allow others to
provide input in order to make decisions that benefit the goals of the institution. The
laissez-faire leader is a facilitator whose purpose is to motivate and inspire
subordinates. They grant complete freedom to others so that subordinates can act in
ways to achieve the goals of the organization. Their primary role is that of providing
resources and moral support to their schools. Leithwood and Duke (1999) examined the
literature on school leadership and found six characteristics that were prevalent in most
studies. The six major categories they found were instructional leadership,
transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, contingency
leadership, and managerial leadership. The categories are found below:

- *Instructional Leadership*: This aspect of leadership focuses on the teachers'
  behavior as they impart their daily lessons. The building principal is

perceived as the instructional leader and coordinates efforts to ensure that students are receiving a quality instruction.

- *Transformational Leadership*: This aspect of leadership focuses on bringing out the best in people. It emphasizes building personnel capacity to achieve the goals of the school. Transformational leaders raise the level of commitment of the employees to increase the organization's effectiveness.

- *Moral Leadership*: The emphasis of this style of leadership is on the values and ethics of leadership. Moral leaders obtain their authority from what is right and ethically correct.

- *Participative Leadership*: The emphasis on this style of leadership is on allowing all stakeholders to come to the table to make the decisions that affect them.

- *Contingency Leadership*: This style of leadership focuses on adapting one's leadership behavior to specific situations. It is believed that those capable of mastering contingency leadership are able to master other styles of leadership.

- *Managerial Leadership*: This type of leadership style emphasizes the duties and responsibilities of the leader. If those duties are carried out effectively, then the work of others will be facilitated.

The six leadership categories described reveal what hundreds of studies say about types of leaders and their styles. It is important for assistant principals to reflect on their practice and identify their leadership style. If an administrator is a strong

instructional leader but makes all the important decision without gathering feedback

from stakeholders, then perhaps it would be beneficial to study the traits associated with

participative leadership and incorporate them to the administrator's repertoire.

Leadership behavior is complex and different situation may call for different

behaviors. The theory that effective leadership is dependent on the situation in which

leadership occurs is more popular today (Waller & Waller 2002). The leadership theory

that adjusts leadership style to situations was developed by Fiedler. Fiedler's

contingency theory (1967) states that leadership effectiveness results when the

leadership style of an individual matches that of the follower.   Two subsets within this

theory explain or describe the way leaders achieve results. Some leaders are task

motivated. Task motivated leaders are most effective when structure is needed and

efficiency in performance is required. Other leaders are relationship-motivated.

Relationship-motivated leaders are most effective when building a positive

interpersonal relationship is required.

The Role of Assistant Principal

The role of the assistant principal is not very well defined (Hausman, Neberek,

& McCreary, 2001). The topic of assistant principals is one of the least researched and

discussed topics in books and professional journals that focus on educational leadership

(Weller & Weller, 2002). As a result of the lack of information and a clear

understanding of what assistant principals are supposed to do, their positions are open to

the interpretation of the building principal (Weller & Weller, 2002). Assistant

principals are usually bound by the phrase often used in their contracts: "Perform other

duties as assigned" (Weller & Weller, 2002, P. 13). What this means is that the role of the assistant principal varies greatly from one educational setting to the next.

According to Busch, MacNeil, and Baraniuk (2010), the role of the assistant principal was created when it became apparent that the responsibilities of the principal became too complex for a one-person job. Soon after its inception, the assistant principal position was consigned to managerial duties such as supervision duties and student discipline (Scoggins, 1993). This is unfortunate since assistant principals have the potential to play a vital role in the overall success of schools. Assistant principals should serve as a link between the principal and teachers, parents and students, and as an extension of the goals and vision of the school as they strive to encourage and implement it (Weller & Weller, 2002).

Researchers Hausman, Nebeker, and McCreary (2001) conducted a study that examined the work life of the assistant principal . They sent out a survey to 300 assistant principals in Maine with 125 responding to the questionnaire. The researchers asked the following questions:

1. How do assistant principals spend their time, and does personal background influence how they enact their roles?

2. What activities do assistant principals feel successful and what factors predict such feelings?

3. How do assistant principals describe their work lives, and what is the relationship between perceived success and quality of work life ratings?

The results of their study indicated that assistant principals spend the majority of their time dealing with student management. Assistant principals who participated in

this study revealed that resolving student problems and contacting parents and teachers was the single activity that consumed the majority of their work day (Hausman, Nebeker, & McCreary, 2001). The second activity identified as significantly occupying the assistant principals' time was personnel management. In their conclusions, they stated that the job of the assistant principals centers on management of people, particularly students. Since managing people requires establishing successful relationships, it is critical to know more about what assistant principals do to foster and improve those relationships with teachers.

A study that supports the notion of the importance between the assistant principal and the teachers was carried out by Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk (2012). In their study, the researchers collected interviews from a pool of 361 assistant principals around the greater Houston area in Texas. The study asked the question: There is probably a lot of advice you could give to someone preparing to become a school assistant principal; but if there was one single piece of advice you could give, what would you advise? Of the 361 respondents, 134, or 37 percent, provided advice that was categorized as skills based. The five skills based categories were relationships, listening, flexibility, communication, high expectations, and organization. The response most frequently reported in this category was relationships (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2012). The skills or descriptors that were part of the category of relationships were responses that dealt with being professional, consistent, and fair. Having a servant perspective, developing rapport, and providing support were other responses included in this category. The frequency in which the assistant principals who participated in

this survey mentioned relationships further supports the notion of the importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers.

Melton et al. (2012) analyzed the role of the assistant principal position in the United States, UK, and China. The following three questions guided their investigation:

1. How do assistant principals in the United States, the UK, and China describe their roles and responsibilities?

2. What do assistant principals in the United States, the UK, and China perceive as challenges in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities?

3. What training do assistant principals in the United States, the UK, and China perceive to be missing from their preparation to assume the future role of principal?

The results of this study indicated that almost half of the respondents included student management/discipline as one of their major roles; however, a prevalent role that was included was faculty/staff supervision (Melton et al., 2012). Even though the duty assignments and responsibilities of assistant principals in different countries are varied, emerging themes continued to arise that deal with personnel management issues such as faculty/staff supervision. These findings support the importance of quality positive relationships between assistant principals and teachers.

Organizational Communication

Weller and Weller (2002) stated that effective communication is of vital importance in our schools. In order to perform their duties adequately, assistant principals continually communicate with students, teachers, parents, and other

community members. The following excerpt from Welller and Weller (2002) clearly illustrates the need for effective communication.

Effective assistant principals must communicate well to maximize their potential as leaders and managers. Their position as liaison between teachers and principal requires expert communication and listening skills. Moreover, they are required to communicate with a wide variety of publics to gain understanding and support. Effective communication skills help sustain the school's culture, build positive working relationships, and reduce the potential for problem or conflict situations. Effective assistant principals lead through influence and persuasion and must be able to accurately and concisely state what they need and must motivate others to cooperate and be committed (p. 110).

From this statement, one can glean that assistant principals must be able to demonstrate effective communication skills in order to have positive working relationships in the school setting.

Lunenberg and Ornstein (2008) explain the process of communication in detail in their book titled *Educational Administration: Concepts and Practices*. The six components of communication outlined by the authors are explained below:

- *Ideating*: The first step of this process is developing an idea or message to be transmitted. The message is intended for a single person or a group. In school environments, the senders could be administrators, teachers, parents, students, superintendents, etc. School administrators communicate with each other, with teachers, parents, and community members.

Communication in schools is necessary to coordinate the daily tasks of all members of an educational institution.

- *Encoding*: This step deals with the symbols that the sender wishes to transmit. The symbols could be words, gestures, body movements, pictures, etc. The symbols themselves do not have any meaning. It is the sender who encodes the meaning that is going to be transmitted. The receiver will then receive the symbol and assign a meaning. The degree of the level of understanding is indicated by the agreement both parties place on the meaning of the symbols. Administrators must ensure that the symbols they use to send a message have mutual meaning for their intended audience.

- *Transmitting*: Transmitting the message could be done through a variety of media. Typical media used in school include memoranda, telephone, e-mails, directives, face-to-face communication, etc. Administrators must also be cautious as to the unintended transmission of messages. Assistant principals may transmit unintended messages when they ignore a request, make facial expressions, and or assume a particular body posture.

- *Receiving*: In this step, the other party must exhibit good listening skills in order to glean the intended meaning of oral messages. When messages are written, the receiver must pay careful attention to the stated and implied meaning of the message.

- *Decoding*: Once the message is received, the recipient assigns a meaning to it. Most barriers to the communication process occur during this step.

- *Acting*: This step closes the loop in the communication process. The message sent is received and decoded for meaning. The recipient of the message can then decide to do three things with it: they can ignore the message, store it for future use, or give feedback. Giving feedback assures the sender that the message was received and clarifies whether its intended meaning was extracted.

It is important to note that the message's meaning is not transmitted. It is the role of the receiver to make meaning out of the sounds or symbols received. It is in this step of the communication process where miscommunication occurs most often. Knowing the components of each step of the communication process allows assistant principals to be cognizant of their methods of communication. The topic of communication has been present in many studies focused on organizational leadership. Its importance is a central theme of many of those studies.

Research in organizational leadership has focused on communication and related concerns such as innovation (Hurt & Teigen, 1977); authority (Richmond, McGroskey, Davis & Koonyz, 1980); communication style (Richmond & McCroskey, 1979); discretionary and non-discretionary leadership; and mission, goals, feedback, rewards, and support (Hunt & Osborn, 1978).

The concept of leadership has been defined in numerous ways. Essays by Fisher (1988) and Scheidel (1987) suggest that effective communication in the workplace is an integral part of effective leadership. In an article discussing the Maine Principals' Academy, Donaldson (1987) states that the academy emphasizes communication, decision making, and conflict management skills as those necessary to carry out

leadership functions. Additionally, after three years of research, designers of the

Effective Schools Questionnaire listed the following four categories as dimensions of

instructional leadership: support, instructional leadership, communication, and visibility

(Brandt, 1987).

A reason for placing much importance on leadership in schools results from the

findings that effective leaders have been linked to effective schools. Research has

confirmed that leadership is a major contributing factor in high achieving schools

(Fairman & Clark, 1982). In concluding research for the development of the Principal

Profile measure, Leithwood (1987) claims, "Effective principals are, in a sense the glue

that holds together the many different parts of the school."

Although there are many different methods used for training principals to

become leaders, there seems to be some consensus regarding the characteristics of

effective principals who run quality schools. Ford (1987) states that school leaders

must "maintain positive, open communication among all concerned parties, and accept

greater input from classroom teachers." Hallinger and Murphy (1986), the authors of

the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale, claim that principals can shape

the learning climate by "maintaining high visibility in order to communicate priorities

and model expectations, and creating a reward system that reinforces academic

achievement and productive effort." Furthermore, the California School Leadership

Academy has developed a model for leadership. Four continuous functions outlined in

the model include "analyzing behavior, feelings and values; problem solving; decision-

making; and communicating" (MacAdam, 1986). Again, communication behavior

appears to be a central element. Different researchers have identified a number of

properties of principals' work (Manasse, 1985; Peterson & Peterson, 1982; Pitner, 1982). These studies show that most of a principal's work occurs in face-to-face, oral interactions with others.

Manasse (1985), in a study on characteristics of effective principals who run quality schools, came to the following conclusions:

- Effective principals have vision, a sense or image of the schools they wish to run. They establish goals and strategies and apply their time to activities that will achieve their goals.

- Effective principals communicate high expectations for their students as well as their staff. They demand and support quality in everything that goes on in the school. They know how to provide clear, accurate, and useful feedback to teachers. They help promote and sustain traditions, rituals, and ceremonies that foster a common culture and set of beliefs within the school.

In nearly all the research examined on leadership, both in educational organizations and other organizations, communication variables were cited as being among the most important factors.

The term 'culture' has been linked to the study of schools for more than two decades. It has been used in reference to entire organizations as well as individual work units. In studying individual work units, or work cultures, a relationship has been found to exist between managers' communication effectiveness and employee satisfaction (Ijaiya, 2000).

Work culture consists of common norms regarding the work groups against which behavior can be judged. The concept of work culture is closely related to the

concept of communication environment and climate. For example, Ijaiya (2000) defines environment as the context in which communication takes place and notes that the cultural aspect of this context is concerned with one's attitudinal frame of reference.

Two categories of perception are related to work unit culture. The first category is "levels of satisfaction," and the second is "what is talked about on the job" (Ijaiya, 2000). Ijaiya (2000) states, "A positive work culture then, is characterized by members of a work unit perceiving themselves to be satisfied with themselves, their job, their co-workers, and the way they are managed with respect to communication about mission, goals, feedback, rewards, and support."

Ekpeyong (1998) estimates that more than 3000 studies on job satisfaction have been published. These studies include such variables as communication apprehension (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2006), self-esteem, permitting employees to communicate in the decision-making process (Falcione, 1974), mission and goals (Ekpeyong, 1998), and feedback (Barnlund, 2008). Furthermore, research has found that employees who have positive perception of the communication of their supervisors are significantly more satisfied. Barnlund (2008) and Ekpeyong (1998) report substantial correlations between employee satisfaction and employee`s perceptions of their supervisor's listening ability, the level of understanding the supervisors shows, and the general quality of the supervisor's communication.

Additionally, Ekpeyong (1998) presented research in which communication variables were used to determine the relationship between perceptions of a principals' leadership effectiveness and teacher satisfaction on the job. In this study, Ekpeyong (1998) administered nine separate measures to 189 elementary and secondary school

teachers. Included were measures for communication quality and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was operationalized with the use of the Job Descriptive Index. The research concluded that a teacher's satisfaction with his or her supervisor appears to be most closely associated with the teacher's perception of the supervisor's communication behavior such as perceived listening, understanding, and quality. That study yielded data of considerable value for understanding and predicting subordinate satisfaction in organizations because it showed that both subordinate perceptions of their supervisors and subordinate's own self concepts are related to satisfaction. This study adds additional information to the research by Falcione (1976) by looking at whether we can predict teacher satisfaction as a result of studying five other communication variables not included in their research.

In a separate study, use of Management Communication Style Scale resulted in the findings that employees who perceive their supervisors as using a more employee-centered management communication style are more satisfied than employees who perceive their bosses as using a more boss-centered management. Similarly, use of the Leadership Survey (Weisinger, 1998) indicates that employees who perceive their supervisors as using the appropriate application and amount of time in communicating mission, goals, feedbacks, rewards, and support perceive themselves as being more satisfied with themselves, their jobs, their co-workers, and the ways they are managed. Thus, employee perceptions of their supervisors play a major role in their level of satisfaction.

According to Solomon (1998), the first of five communication content areas that are important is "mission." Feeling a sense of mission on the job is important because it

provides a context for understanding one`s role and making sense of the tasks one is required to perform. Waterman (1982) found in their study of excellent companies that each had a chief executive officer who had articulated a mission and what is special about the company. One major purpose of a clearly communicated mission is that it can be a vehicle for change. Solomon (1998) did a case study of a major school that was experiencing low morale and lower productivity than had been forecast. As a result of that study, it was concluded, "If the principal can articulate and gain member commitment to a vision of the future, the mission then serves as an important stimulus for change towards excellence."

School Climate

Researchers have documented the claim that a positive school climate leads to better educational outcomes for students (Bryk et al., 2010). In an article titled *Principal-Teacher Interactions: How Affective Relationships Shape Principal and Teacher Attitudes*, Price (2012) states that the attitudes of principals and teachers create an atmosphere for learning. The researcher also states there are sufficient arguments supporting the theory that the interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers are correlated with the attitudes of the faculty and staff and, in turn, those attitudes define the whole school climate (Prince, 2012).

The field of school climate has been studied thoroughly from diverse angles. Schools that enjoy positive school climates are said more likely to be successful schools (Bryk and Driscoll, 1988). There is significant evidence that supports the clear and positive affect that a positive school climate has on schools. In positive school climates, educators feel vindicated by their efforts and the way they affect students (Dinham &

Scott, 1998; Kelley, 1999). In addition, students benefit when educators devote time and effort in their educational attainment (Price, 2012).

The literature around school climate and culture is growing. The importance of a healthy culture has prompted researchers to carry out studies revolving around how school leaders can improve schools by improving the climate and culture. Leithwood, Anderson, Louis and Wahlstrom (2004) indicate that school leaders need to learn their school's culture before attempting change. Implementing change before knowing the school's culture could produce unwanted results based on teacher resistance and lack of buy-in from the stakeholders. In the article titled *A 4-step Process for Identifying and Reshaping School Culture*, Bulach (199) also states that school leaders must spend time learning the ins and outs of the school culture before attempting to change it. Lakomski (2001) made a very strong case for the effect of leadership on school culture. The researcher indicated that a causal relationship exists between the school leader and learning. Lakomski (2001) also stated that school leaders must change an organization's culture before attempting to bring about organizational change. The case of the importance of a healthy school culture and its effect on student achievement has been made by many. The importance the principal as the instructional leader is another concept that has received much attention in recent years. However, Fullan (2001) argued that being an instructional leader is not enough to sustain a prolonged period of school improvement. It is necessary to combine instructional leadership with a focused aim at improving the culture of schools.

What precisely is organizational climate? A singular definition does not exist but rather a plethora of different ones have been put forth by educational theorists

across the country. A collection of definitions are found in the work of Gunbayi (2007). A definition by Litwin and Stringer (1968) states that climate is the leadership style of managers and other environmental factors that affect the attitudes, beliefs, values, and motivation of the people who work in an organization. Halphin (1967) states that climate is the personality of the organization. Spencer, Pelote, and Seymore (1998) declare that the atmosphere of the workplace, including a complex mixture of norms, values, expectations, policies, and procedures, influence individual and group patterns of behavior. Hall, Bowen, and Lewicki (1987) state that climate refers to the generalized perceptions that people employ in thinking about and describing the organization in which they work. Schneider, Wheeler, and Cox (1992) define climate as the employees' perceptions of the events, practices, and procedures as well as their perceptions of the behaviors that are rewarded, supported, and expected within an organization. Similarly, James and James (1989) write that climate is the result of valuations or cognitive appraisals of environmental factors in terms of their acquired meanings to the individual. Freiberg and Steing (1999) define school climate as the essence that draws students and teachers to love their school. When teachers and students feel this love for their school, they are more likely to be a part of it and participate in school improvement goals. School climate has even been shown to be one of the most important factors in school affecting student achievement (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg). The definitions of school climate are varied, but they all speak to the importance of having a healthy one in order for schools to succeed.

An article written by MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) supports the claim that schools that enjoy a healthy climate have students who perform better on standardized

testing. In their article, the researchers surveyed a total of 1727 teachers using the

Organizational Health Inventory. The 1727 teachers belonged to 29 schools. The

purpose of their study was to find out whether being rated as an Exemplary,

Recognized, Acceptable, or Unacceptable school had any correlation to the findings of

the individual school's climate based on the Organizational Health Inventory. The

researchers concluded that "Significant differences were found on all 10 dimensions of

the Organizational Health Inventory, with Exemplary schools out-performing

Acceptable schools."

Schools that do not enjoy a healthy climate struggle to achieve their mission and

goals. These schools tend to lack an effective leader, and, as a result, teachers and staff

are unhappy in their jobs. This causes neither the students nor teachers to be invested

in the educational outcomes of the school (Hoy & Tarter, 1997).

Leaders can influence the culture of a school in many ways. Peterson and Deal

(1998) outline several aspects that leaders can do to influence school culture:

- leaders communicate core values in what they say and do;

- they honor and recognize those who have worked to serve students and the
  purpose of the school;

- they observe rituals and traditions to support the school's heart and soul;

- they recognize heroes and heroines and the work these exemplars
  accomplish;

- they eloquently speak of the deeper mission of the school;

- they celebrate the accomplishments of the staff, the students, and the
  community; and

- they preserve the focus on students by recounting stories of success and achievement.

The researchers mention that in order to influence the culture, school leaders must pay attention to three things. First, they must be able to read the culture. They must find out the embedded values that drive teacher behavior before attempting to change it. In this first step, leaders are able to define the current culture. Second, they must uncover and articulate those values. This is where the positive values are identified and embraced and the negative values are worked with so that they may shift to positive ones. And third, leaders must work to reinforce the elements that are positive and use them as a springboard for school improvement.

Once the culture and climate have been established, school leaders must work to maintain them. Lunenberg and Ornstein (2008) developed a model designed to guide administrators to maintain a positive school culture. The following seven steps designed by Lunenberg and Ornstein provide a specific plan to maintain a positive school culture:

- *Selection of Entry-Level Candidates*: The socialization process starts with the careful selection of entry-level candidates. Trained recruiters use standardized procedures and focus on values that are important in the culture. Those candidates whose personal values do not fit with the underlying values of the organization are given ample opportunity to opt out.

- *Humility-Inducing Experiences*: After the candidate is hired, considerable training ensues to expose the person to the culture. Humility-inducing

experiences, which cause employees to question prior beliefs and values, are assigned, thereby making new employees more receptive to the values of the new culture. Many organizations give new hired employees more work than they can reasonably handle and assign work for which the individual is overqualified.

- *Job Mastery*: This step is designed to develop the employee's technological knowledge. As employees move along a career path, the organization assesses their performance and assigns other responsibilities on the basis of their progress. Frequently, organizations establish a step-by-step approach to this career plan. For example, the Holmes Group recommends a three-step career ladder process for teachers: (1) instructors, (2) professional teachers, (3) career professionals. The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession proposes another approach consisting of four steps: (1) licensed teachers, (2) certified teachers, (3) advanced certified teachers, and (4) lead teachers.

- *Reward and Control Systems*: The organization pays meticulous attention to measuring operational results and to rewarding individual performance. Reward systems are comprehensive, consistent, and focus on those aspects of the organization that are tied to success and the values of the culture. For example, a school district will specify the factors that are considered important for success. Operational measures are used to assess these factors, and performance appraisals of employees are tied to the accomplishment of

these factors. Promotions and merit pay are determined by success on each of the predetermined critical factors.

- *Adherence to Values*: As personnel continue to work for the organization, their behavior closely matches the underlying values of the culture. Identification with underlying values helps employees reconcile personal sacrifices cause by their membership in the organization. Personnel learn to accept the organization's values and place their trust in the organization not to hurt them. For instance, school administrators work long hours on a multiplicity of fragmented tasks for which they sometimes receive little recognition from their superiors, subordinates, and the community. They sometimes endure ineffective school board members and supervisors and job assignments that are undesirable and inconvenient. Identification with the common values of the organization allows these administrators to justify such personal sacrifices.

- *Reinforcing Folklore*: Throughout the socialization process, the organization exposes its members to rites and rituals, stories or myths, and heroes that portray and reinforce culture. For example, in one educational institution, the story is told of an administrator who was fired because of his harsh handling of subordinates. The administrator had incorrectly believed a myth that being "tough" with his subordinates would enhance himself in the eyes of his superiors. The organization deemed such managerial behavior inconsistent with its organizational philosophy of cultivating good

interpersonal relationships and high levels of morale and job satisfaction

among all its employees.

- *Consistent Role Models*: Those individuals who have performed well in the

    organization serve as role models to newcomers to the organization. By

    identifying these employees as symbolizing success, the organization

    encourages others to do the same. Role models in strong-culture institutions

    can be thought of as one type of ongoing staff development for all

    organizational members. (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008)

Leaders are called to practice these seven steps in order to maintain a positive school

climate in those schools that already enjoy them.

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) also developed the concept of a "change cycle"

in organizations that need a better direction than their current one. In their model, the

authors give a specific guide as to the conditions that enable change. These conditions

are found below:

- *External Enabling Conditions*: Enabling conditions, if they exist, indicate

    that the environment will be supportive of cultural change. Such conditions

    are in the external environment and affect the organization. In a school

    setting, examples include scarcity or abundance of students, stability or

    instability of the external environment, and resource concentration or

    dispersion. In combination, these external enabling conditions determine the

    degree of threat to the organization's input sources (information, people, and

    materials).

- *Internal Permitting Conditions*: To increase the likelihood of organizational culture change, four internal permitting conditions must exist: (1) a surplus of change resources (managerial time and energy, financial resources, and the like that are available to the system beyond those needed for normal operating); (2) system readiness (willingness of most members to live with the anxiety that comes with anticipated uncertainty that is characteristic of change); (3) minimal coupling (coordination and integration of system components); and (4) change-agent power and leadership (the ability of administrators to envision alternative organizational futures).

- *Precipitating Pressures*: Four factors that precipitate organizational culture change include (1) atypical performance; (2) pressure exerted by stakeholders; (3) organizational growth or decrement in size, membership heterogeneity, or structural complexity; and (4) real or perceived crises associated with environmental uncertainty.

- *Triggering Events*: Culture change usually begins in response to one or more triggering events. Examples include (1) environmental calamities or opportunities such as natural disasters, economic recession, innovations, or the discovery of new markets: (2) managerial crisis such as a major shakeup of top administration, an inappropriate strategic decision, or a foolish expenditure; (3) external revolution such as mandated desegregation, PL101-476, or Title IX; and (4) internal revolution such as the installation of a new administrative team within the organization.

- *Cultural Visioning*: Creating a vision of a new, more preferred organizational culture is a necessary step toward that culture's formation. Leaders survey the beliefs, values, assumptions, and behaviors of the organization's existing culture. Then they seek to anticipate future conditions and create an image of the organization within that future.

- *Culture Change Strategy*: Once a new cultural vision exists, an organization needs a strategy to achieve that culture. Such a strategy outlines the general process of transforming the present culture into a new one.

- *Culture Change Action Plans*: A series of explicit actions plans for the inducement, management, and stabilization of change make a change strategy known. Inducement action planning involves stimulating organizational members to a change or countering resistance to change. Management action planning involves outlining interventions and mobilizing change agents. Stabilization action planning focuses on the institutionalization of culture change, that is, establishing the existence of the new culture as an accepted fact.

- *Implementation of Interventions*: An organization selects culture change interventions based on the ecology of a particular organization for each action plan phase and the change agent's competencies in implementing them.

- *Reformulation of Culture*: When implemented, the intervention plans result in a reformulated culture. (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008)

Not one organization is exactly alike another. Since it has been reported that school climate is directly affected by the actions of the school principal, and the relationships between the school principal and teachers affect school climate, it is important to examine how assistant principals attempt to create and nurture positive working relationships with teachers in schools.

Trust in Schools

An important indicator of a positive school climate in schools is the presence of trust in organizations. If there is a strong sense of trust between teachers and administrators, then the school will move in the right direction. What is trust? In his article titled *Confidence, Trust, and Respect: The Preeminent Goals of Educational Reform*, Willie (2000) uses the following words to express his meaning of trust:

> Trust is based on reliable evidence that the other accepts one as one is before attempting to initiate change in behavior, that the other respects one's whole being and is interested in one beyond a specific utilitarian purpose. When the other, by word and action, demonstrates that one has been accepted just as one is, the accepted person or group can depend on the other without fear of betrayal. This is the essence of trust, depending on others without fear that they will take advantage of one's weaknesses.

This explanation provides a working definition of what it means to have the trust of students, teachers, and staff. Willie goes a step further and outlines the relationship that exists between trust and confidence. Trust, he explains, is what subdominant people have in dominant people of power. Confidence, on the other hand, is what dominant people have for subdominant people of power such as students and teachers (Willie

2000). This is important because one cannot exist without the other (Willie 2000). In other words, principals cannot lead teachers in whom they do not have confidence in and teachers cannot follow a leader they do not trust. This concept identifies a need for trust in schools.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) also explain that an interrelated set of shared dependencies exist in every school. Professionals in every school position depend on each other. The teacher depends on the principal for leadership, and the principal depends on the teacher for carrying out the vision and goals of the school. When this is understood across all levels of a particular school, people realize that there is a degree of vulnerability shared by all. When participants make efforts to reduce this vulnerability to make each other feel safe and secure, trust emerges (Bryk & Schneider 2003). The emergence of trust; therefore, provides a good foundation for effective professional relationships in the school setting. This concept illustrated by Bryk and Schneider also demonstrates the need for trust in schools.

The importance of trust is a key element of effective schools. In their paper titled *Developing Trust between Principal and Teachers*, MacNeil, Spuck, and Ceyanes (1998) state that trust is so important for schools that Texas policy makers have included them in the proficiency requirements for attaining principal certification. Principals must be able to develop a school climate in which trust is present. In the absence of trust, site-based decision making, teaming, and collaboration cannot occur (MacNeil, Spuck, & Ceyanes 1998). Furthermore, when there is no trust present in professional relationships, cooperation comes only through the means of rules and

regulations that have to be negotiated and enforced, sometimes by dictatorial means (MacNeil, Spuck, & Ceyanes 1998).

Nurturing relationships in school settings cannot develop unless there is a strong bond of trust between teachers (Troman, 2000). In his article titled *Teacher Stress in the Low-Trust Society*, Troman (2000) argues that teaching is an emotional practice that has been negatively affected by the restructuring of schools in the United Kingdom since the 1980s. The intensification of work and teacher duties has created an "us and them" culture that is prevalent in many school settings. Teachers who work under these kinds of conditions have been found to experience high levels of stress (Troman, 2000). It seems that trust in schools could help alleviate the high stress that teachers are experiencing in Troman's findings.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) make a strong case for the need of trust in schools. In their article titled *A Multidisciplinary Analysis of the Nature, Meaning, and Measurement of Trust*, they state that distrust is a great obstacle for the many reforms that are taking place in American schools. When there is distrust, people are less willing to take risks. Distrust also provokes feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Furthermore, subordinates may withhold or use deception to protect their own interest (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). A negative aspect of distrust is that once it is present in schools, it is very difficult eliminate. When people work in environments where distrust is prevalent, even good intentioned actions may be perceived with cynicism (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust, on the other hand, has been shown to reduce uncertainty in situations of interdependence (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000). The authors of this study state that trust is necessary to establish the foundation, cooperation

and communication, for cohesive and productive relationships. They state that "Trust functions as a lubricant greasing the way for effective operations when people have confidence in other people's words and deeds" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The importance of trust in schools is clear since new reforms calling for higher expectations and effectiveness from all school personnel demand it in order to have effective educational institutions.

An example of how trust can be a deciding factor that makes or breaks a novice teacher is found in "A Roller Coaster Ride: The Twists and Turns of a Novice Teacher's Relationship with Her Principal." In this article, Normore and Floyd (2005) portray Kristine as a struggling first-year teacher who has been assigned a position she did not feel prepared for. No support had been given by the department head or the administration. She was then surprised by her department head, whom under the directions of the administrators, informed her of her shortcomings in a negative light. Kristine then states, "I felt my principal had betrayed me by believing that I should be motivated by stress, fear, and intimidation" (Normore & Floyd, 2005). This feeling of betrayal was only overcome with a help and support of a caring experienced colleague. Kristine argues that she had confidence that the particular teacher would listen to her. She also states, "I trusted this woman and after all that had happened… she was the only one she felt comfortable turning to." The relationship between confidence and trust expressed by Charles Willie is clear in the accounts of this first-year teacher. Trust, therefore, is not only important for the overall functioning of schools but also for specific professional relationships that form the climate of effective schools.

School reform is a trend that has been employed in schools across the country.

Successful school reform occurs more often in campuses where there is strong relational

trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). When there are strong trusting relationships, reform

initiatives diffuse through the majority of school personnel since they are more likely to

take the risks associated with change. In addition, principals feel safe when

experimenting with reform initiatives when they have the trust and support of teachers

(Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Initiating the discussion about what works and what does

not as it pertains to school reform necessitates exposing one's one ignorance and

vulnerability. If there is no trust, these types of conversations do not easily emerge

(Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Bryk and Schneider go even further by arguing that teachers

who work in high trusting environments deem the difficult work needed for reform as

necessary. They are more willing to take on added responsibilities for the overall goal

of improving ways in which students learn (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Successful

school reform can be said to bring about school effectiveness. Tschannen-Moran and

Hoy mention that when teachers trust each other and their principal, school

effectiveness and teacher quality increases. Faculty trust is also a positive indicator in

student achievement. In addition, it has been found that when trust is placed in students

and parents, there is a higher level of school achievement in reading and mathematics

(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Many leadership attributes have been identified as behaviors that elicit trust. In

The Four Elements of Trust, Devin Vodicka (2006) argues that consistency,

compassion, communication, and competency are four aspects of interpersonal

relationships that foster trust. In his article he states, "The potential for catalyzing

school improvement by promoting trusting relationships is reinforced by research that indicates that how much teachers trust their principal is wholly dependent on the behaviors of the principal and is largely unaffected by broader sociopolitical factors." (Vodicka 2006). This statement is very important since it has been established that trust is a very important factor in effective schools, and it can be gained by specific behaviors exhibited by the school principal. The everyday behavior eliciting trust has been categorized by Vodicka into the four categories mentioned above. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy have identified specific behaviors that fall into these four categories. Behaviors identified include using communication in an accurate and forthcoming way, communicating thoughts and ideas freely with employees, encouraging teachers to voice their frustrations candidly, and sharing control when it comes to decision making (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000). It is evident that trust is an important factor in creating a positive school climate and leaders can behave in ways that elicit trust. Assistant principals can serve as a vehicle that strives to produce positive working relationships with teachers through trust. Assistant principals can achieve this by being cognizant of their daily interactions with teachers. They can communicate in ways that are hones and direct. Assistant principals should be candid and not hold back information, which can later be perceived as deceptive.

Teacher Morale

The amount of pressure placed on teachers to produce better results has greatly increased in the last few decades. Teachers are expected to be experts in their content areas and pedagogy while also providing students with a vast array of personal support (Lumsden, 1998). It seems that the expectations placed on teachers are growing

exponentially. Since the added pressures can take a heavy toll on the teaching

profession and staff morale, it is critical for teachers to find meaning in their work.

When employees find meaning in their work, and when their goals are aligned to those

of the organization, teacher morale is heightened (Bentley & Rempel, 1980). Teacher

morale also plays an important part in the teachers' attitudes towards their work.

Increased teacher morale has been found to be correlated with higher student

achievement (Houchard, 2005). The importance of high teacher morale is critical in

order to meet the demands and pressures being placed in the educational system in

America.

Teacher morale is an area that has been defined in more than one way. Bentley

and Rempel (1980) defined teacher morale as "the professional interest and enthusiasm

that a person displays toward the achievement of individual and group goals in a given

job situation." The researchers also iterate that teacher morale deals with the

relationship between the goals of an organization and the needs of an individual. Thus,

teacher moral is heightened when the individual goals are aligned with those of the

organization. Other researchers claim that teacher morale is viewed by many as a

significant area of importance in schools; yet, the concept itself is difficult to define

(Washington & Watson, 1976; Evans 1998). Morale is defined by *Merriam-Webster's*

Collegiate Dictionary as the "mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm,

confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regards to the function or task at

hand." The definition also states that morale is "a sense of common purpose with

respect to a group and the level of individual psychological well-being based on such

factors as a sense of purpose and confidence in the future." Mendel (1987) described

morale as a feeling or state of mind that includes one's mental and emotional attitude. Washington and Watson (1976) stated that morale revolved around the attitudes and feelings exhibited by employees toward their job and how it impacted the goals of the whole organization. Clough (1989) defined morale as having a shared purpose and optimism in achieving the organization's goals. Finally, Korner (1990) stated that teacher morale was about the quality of lives within an organization. Korner stated that, in order to have healthy morale, teachers must feel known and appreciated, their professional knowledge should be valued, and they should be given professional flexibility to make important decisions that impact their students.

In an attempt to clearly define the meaning of morale in organizations, Lipham, Ranking, and Hoeh (1985) indicated three factors that make up morale. The first factor is effectiveness. Employees are effective when their individual behavior is in tandem with the expected behavior of the organization. The second factor is efficiency. Efficiency is present in an organization when both individual and group behavior match for the purpose of achieving shared goals. The third and last factor is satisfaction. In order to be satisfied in the workplace, employee's needs must be met when the organization meets its goals. Getzel and Guba (1957) gave a similar account of the three factors that encompass morale. Their three factors included belongingness, rationality, and identification. Belongingness dealt with teachers' satisfaction derived from the daily interactions and job responsibilities within the organization. Rationality revolved around the teachers' perception of their role and the match to the goals of the school. Lastly, identification revolved around having the needs of individual teachers

match those of the school. When the needs are aligned, employees identify their work as conducive towards meeting the school's goals.

In order to have high teacher morale, the needs of the faculty must be met. From basic needs to self-actualization, Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) explained Maslow's need hierarchy theory by stating the following essential needs:

- *Physiological needs*: These include the need for food, water, and shelter. Once these needs are sufficiently satisfied, other levels of needs become prominent and provide motivation for an individual's behavior. Organizations might satisfy these needs by providing a base salary and basic working conditions, such as heat, air conditioning, and cafeteria services.

- *Safety Needs*: These include protection against danger, threat, and depravation, including avoidance of anxiety. Organizations can provide these needs with safe working conditions, fair rules and regulations, job security, pension and insurance plans, salary increases, and the freedom to unionize.

- *Social Needs*: These include affection, affiliation, friendship, and love. People who reach this third level in the hierarchy have primarily satisfied physiological and safety needs. Organizations might meet these needs by including employee-centered supervision, providing opportunities for teamwork, following group norms, and sponsoring group activities, such as organized sports programs and schools or district wide picnics.

- *Esteem Needs*: These focus on self-respect and include recognition and respect from others. Fulfilling esteem needs produces feelings of self-

confidence, prestige, power, and control. Organizations can satisfy this need

through recognition and award programs, articles in the district newsletter,

promotions, and prestigious job titles.

- *Self-actualization Needs:* These needs focus on the attainment of one's full

  potential for continued self-development – in Maslow's words, the desire to

  become "more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything

  one is capable of becoming." Unlike the other needs, self-actualization is

  manifested differently in people. For example, to achieve ultimate

  satisfaction, a musician must create music, an artist must paint, a teacher

  must teach students, and an administrator must lead people. Organizations

  might provide self-actualization by involving employees in planning job

  designs, making assignments that capitalize on employee's unique skills, and

  relaxing structure to permit employee's personal growth and self-

  development. (p. 95)

Focusing on self-actualization, when more essential needs are not being met

would produce undesired results. It is important for school leaders such as assistant

principals to ensure that the teachers' needs are being met so that deficiencies are not

having a negative impact on school morale.

Researchers have documented factors that play a significant role in developing

healthy staff morale. Koerner (1990) listed the following 13 factors as effecting teacher

morale:

- Shared decision-making in curriculum, instruction, and school climate;

- Student and teacher appreciation through a rewards program that acknowledges their contribution to the school;

- A healthy school climate that embraces unity, pride, cooperation, diversity, and security;

- Effective communication;

- Opportunities for professional growth;

- Clear vision and mission;

- Strong, supportive leadership;

- Time for collegial interaction for planning, decision-making, problem solving, and dialogue;

- Adequate physical resources;

- Positive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders;

- Support for innovation, risk taking, and good teaching;

- Security needs such as salary, benefits, etc.; and

- Attention to personal needs such as stress management, good health, and social interaction. (p. 2)

According to Wentworth, these 13 characteristics must be present in order for schools to enjoy high staff morale. Parks (1983) has also offered its own factors that are present in organization with high morale. Those factors are: (1) feeling good about oneself; (2) being free from economic worry; (3) living a life in an environment that is free from hazards to physical and mental health; (4) having the ability to exhibit one's own creations; and, (4) having the freedom and opportunity to love and be loved.

Organizations with low morale are also characterized by certain identified factors. Koerner (1990) explained that low staff morale results from finding little meaning in one's professional life, inability to change course, and from goals and demands that stretch human and material resources. Brodinsky (1994) added that reduced job security, stained relationships with principals, negative perception towards the teaching profession, low salaries, inadequate resources, and lack of clear feedback were reasons teachers attributed to low staff morale. Strickland (1962) identified 10 factors that contribute to low teacher morale. Among those factors are lack of support and cooperation from administration, overwhelming clerical duties, declining parent support, and student discipline. Barth (1990) also examined the causes that prevent schools from reaching a higher level of teacher morale. Among the causes mentioned were feeling unappreciated, overworked, and not respected as professionals. Barth claimed that teachers that work in schools with low morale do not trust the administration and feel powerless in terms of affecting change within the school. In *Teacher Morale*, Lumsden (1998) stated that low morale in schools leads to decreased teacher productivity, apathy towards students, alienation from colleagues, depression, increased absenteeism, and burnout. It is not enough to simply describe organizations with either low or high morale. It is imperative that this phenomenon is studied for the purpose of positively affecting the morale of organizations. Leadership behavior has been found to play a key role in the morale of organizations.

Adams (1992) suggested that school leaders can positively influence teacher morale by recognizing the hard work of teachers and handling the daily contingencies of the workday. Washington and Watson (1976) have also stated that teacher morale is

a topic that merits specific attention. They stated that it is critical to realize that teacher

morale is not merely shaped by what happens in the course of daily events. School

morale must be cultivated, developed, and nurtured by caring principals. Furthermore,

Whitaker, Whitaker, and Lumpa (2000) encouraged school leaders to pay close

attention to the importance of the relationships that exist between colleagues and how

they affect teacher morale. It has been indicated that the relationship between teachers

and school leaders are more important in determining school morale than the

relationships between teachers (Hood, 1965). Coulson (1988) added that effective

leadership was not solely determined by the policies and procedures in schools, but by

the quality of the relationships that administrators build with teachers. Clough (1989)

indicated that leaders could embark or apply these ten approaches in order to raise

teacher morale:

- Get to know teachers;

- Encourage professional growth;

- Do not become involved in personal matters;

- Compliment hard work and dedication;

- Have clear goals and the resources necessary to reach them;

- Encourage creativity;

- Provide a safe and caring environment and use humor;

- Have reasonable goals that are attainable;

- Allow them to work and avoid micro-managing; and

- Be available to teachers. (p. 6)

When attempting to improve school morale, school leaders can concentrate on the ten actions described by Clough and the findings described in this chapter.

School leaders should strive to improve teacher morale in schools. If teachers feel empowered and happy at the workplace, they will work harder and maintain a positive attitude toward school initiatives (Maehr, Midgley, & Urdan, 1993). It is evident from the review of the literature that increasing teacher morale is possible. Assistant principals can concentrate on the relationships they have with teachers and incorporate some of the suggestions found in the review of literature into the way they interact with teachers.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this study was to analyze the importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. More research needs to be done on this topic since teachers and assistant principals play a vital role in the overall functioning of a school. Having positive relationships between teachers and the leadership team of schools is important in order to preserve teacher satisfaction and increase morale. A primary goal of educators should be to increase student achievement among all students, especially ones from different socioeconomic status and minorities. Having high teacher satisfaction in their jobs could be an integral component of achieving this in our schools. A great way to increase teacher satisfaction could be by working on creating and maintaining positive professional relationships between assistant principals and teachers. This study analyzed a section of a larger study conducted over a period of 18 months by a large research university in the Gulf Coast Region of Southeast Texas. The goal of this study was to analyze the responses obtained from the assistant principal interviews about the importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers to illustrate emergent themes. In addition, the aim of the study was to analyze the results in order to improve principal preparation programs and provide critical feedback to active assistant principals.

Research Design

In this study, the researcher analyzed a portion of a larger study conducted by a large research university in the greater Houston area. The larger study analyzed data acquired from 361 active assistant principals. The methodology used in this study was based on previous studies examining the archived data. The data acquired contained demographic information including the assistant principal's age, gender, years as an assistant principal, years in education, degrees held, year of management certification, institution granting management certification, ethnicity, major teaching field, extra-curricular activities while a teacher, school location, number of students in the schools where they work, number of teachers in the schools where they work, accountability rating, and percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. In addition, the original study focused on critical issues facing assistant principals including student discipline, parental involvement, teacher supervision, advice to emerging school leaders, and professional relationships.

This study focused solely on the importance of the professional relationships between assistant principals and teachers and analyzed the archived data previously acquired. This study included the use of survey research. Participants in the study were interviewed using cognitive interviews. The interviews were conducted over an 18 month period and administered by graduate students from a principal preparation program. Administering the interviews was part of their coursework. The interviews administered counted as a portion of their class grade, thereby helping to ensure the faithful administration of the interviews. The students administered the surveys to four assistant principals. Most of the interviews were held at the place where the graduate

students worked. The professors who designed the instrument of the larger study instructed the graduate students on the traditional and cognitive interview techniques to ensure appropriate procedures in data gathering. In this particular study, the following four questions will be addressed:

1. Why is the relationship between teachers and assistant principals important for the school?

2. What are the most critical features for a successful working relationship between teachers and assistant principals?

3. What do assistant principals do to create good professional relationships with teachers?

4. How do assistant principals look out for the personal welfare of their teachers?

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of a varied group of 361 active assistant principals. The survey results from this study represented the views of the assistant principals interviewed. The geographic area in which the surveys were conducted was a large metropolitan area in Southeast Texas. The study was conducted by different sets of students because the study lasted 18 months. The assistant principals interviewed consisted of 105 males and 235 females. The age of the participants ranged from younger than 30 to greater than 63 years old. The ethnicities identified by the participants included 51% Caucasian, 24% African American, 18% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 2% Native American, and 3% did not identify themselves with a particular ethnicity.   Of the 361 participants in the study, 153 worked in elementary schools, 96

worked in middle schools, and 90 worked in high schools. The schools included in the study were primarily in urban and suburban settings with only a handful in rural areas. The Texas accountability system categorizes school into four categories. Those categories include unacceptable, acceptable, recognized, and exemplary. The participants in the survey reported the accountability rating of their campuses. The majority of the respondents worked in schools rated as acceptable. In the study, there were 190 respondents working in acceptable schools, 101 recognized, 35 exemplary, and 20 unacceptable. Thirty-eight respondents did not provide an accountability rating for their school.

Instrument

This study focused primarily on the responses to four questions included in the original study about the importance of the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. The original study consisted of 115 items about issues facing assistant principals. The items were divided as follows: 22 items dealt with the background and demographics of their current campus, 62 were Likert-scale items, and 31 open-ended questions. This study analyzed four of the 31 open-ended questions. The instrument used in this study was intended to provide field experience to graduate students in a master's of education program. The students were trained on the appropriate method of collecting data using the instrument developed by two university professor of a large research university. Since the overall survey consisted of a significant amount of data being gathered, the researchers believed that face-to-face interviews were required to ensure that the information was helpful and informative. Mailing the surveys out to assistant principals across the greater Houston area and expecting them to fully answer

each question of the original survey was unrealistic due to the length and complexity of the instrument.

Data Analysis

The data that was analyzed in this study is part of archived data that has been previously collected through principal surveys and cognitive interviews. The methodology of this study followed the format of other previously completed studies that analyzed the same archival data used in this current study. The type of interview used for the original study was cognitive interviews. The use of cognitive interviews was initially developed to aid in the beginning stages of validating an instrument. The use of cognitive interviews has expanded into other areas of survey research (Desimone, 2004; Willis, 2005).

Two specific types of interviews have been identified by Willis (2005). The two techniques are the think-aloud approach and the verbal probing. In the first approach, the interviewer collects the subject's response in full detail after asking the question. The purpose of this technique is to ensure or test the validity of research instruments in the first stages of their development. The second approach involves a higher degree of interaction from the interviewer. Clarifying and follow-up questions are asked in order to obtain additional details that are relevant to the study. The use of cognitive interviews allows the researcher to obtain descriptive information typically acquired by qualitative case studies and also retains the standard characteristics of traditional survey research (Willis, 2005). In addition, the interview protocol approach allows the researcher to verify that the participant in the survey has the same level of

understanding in regard to the questions being administered. This allows researchers to

address areas of validity and reliability of survey research (Desimone, 2004).

The responses to the four questions dealing with the importance of the

relationship between assistant principals and teachers were analyzed to detect emergent

themes from the original survey. When the emergent themes were identified, they were

operationally defined based on the available literature pertaining to the study and the

survey responses. The data was placed in different categories depending on the

participant responses. The categories served to inform the researcher about the assistant

principal's collective views about the importance of the relationship between assistant

principals and teachers.

Validity and Reliability

Convenience sampling was the type of sampling method used in the original

survey. As a result of convenience sampling, the participants might not reflect the

overall demographics of the geographic area in which the study was carried out. A

factor that aided the risk of not having a representative sample was the fact that the

students carrying out the survey represented an ethnically diverse pool. The 371

assistant principals that participated in the study represented 37 public school districts

and 20 private and charter schools in the Greater Houston area. In the original study,

there were 83 instances of duplicate interviews. The responses from the duplicate

interview were not included in the final data collection. It is important to note that this

served as a test-retest validity of the assistant principals' responses over multiple survey

administration. In addition, the large number of students administering the survey

ensured instrument reliability by capturing the views of the assistant principals

independently of who administered the survey.

Limitations

An important limitation of the study is that convenience sampling does not allow

for a true random sampling of participants. The original survey did not include the

assistant principals who chose not to participate in the survey. Since convenience

sampling was used, many assistant principals interviewed the same assistant principals.

The duplicates were eliminated from the data set, but they proved useful since the

duplicated responses were very similar. This helped prove the reliability of the

instrument.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to find out about the importance that assistant principals place on the relationships between assistant principals and teachers. The four questions that were analyzed for this study were: (1) Why is the relationship between the assistant principal and the teacher important for the school? (2) What is the most critical feature for a successful working relationship between the assistant principal and the teacher? (3) What do assistant principals do to create good relations with their teachers? And, (4) how does the principal look out for the personal welfare of the teachers? In this study, the answers to the four research questions were analyzed for the 361 assistant principals that participated. The number of responses for the research questions exceeded the number of respondents because the assistant principals reported answers that fell into more than one category. The frequency of responses for each research question was recorded into the categories that it belonged to. The demographic information obtained from each respondent included : age, sex, years of practice as an assistant principal, years in the education field, type of degree held, year of certification, institution granting degree, ethnicity of respondents, teaching field of respondents or background, extra-curricular activities sponsored while a teacher, location of school, number of teachers in their schools, number of students in their school, ethnicity of students, accountability rating determined by the state of Texas accountability system, and percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. For the purposes of this study, gender, years of practice as an assistant principal, accountability rating, and the

type of school were analyzed for this chapter. In this chapter, sample responses for

each question were analyzed based on the frequency of responses under each category.

Each question was analyzed further by the demographic information stated above.

Samples of assistant principal responses were included for each question.

Research Question One

For the question "*Why is the relationship between the principal and the teacher*

important for the school?" the respondents provided the following answers:

- "Communication is paramount. We are professionals. We should have professional level communication. I do have an open-door policy and sometimes it is easier for a teacher to come to an assistant principal than it is for them to come to a principal…"
- "Need to talk and make sure both are focused on the same task, the students"
- "Relationships must be collaborative, supportive, and caring."
- "Teachers are the most important factor in a child's academic success and they need help in being a positive factor— materials, ongoing professional development, and discipline support."
- "That is the biggest question and has to do more with my philosophy. With anybody in any relationship you have to build trust. They don't know me, I wasn't at their campus and so I am new to them. They are looking at me saying who is she? What is she going to do for us? What is her style? I always try and build trust. If they have needs I try and meet those needs first. I follow through. I am trustworthy. Once you build that trust, you can build a relationship. Building trust lets the communication flow. This way our communication flows, and when I have to tell them something, they accept what I have to say."
- "It is very important to have a working relationship with teachers and include them in the decision making process. This keeps everyone focused on the same goals."
- "Clearly the principal is the instructional leader of the school and the teachers foster and support the leadership. The teachers are vessels for the educational climate."
- "Eighty percent of what you achieve at your school will come down to the relationships between the assistant principal and teachers. Without the support of your teachers, a principal has no real power to make a change."

- "This is one of the most essential relationships. Teachers are the machinery that makes a school work, and my role is to keep the machinery functioning well. It is essential to be a team with your teaching staff. When this relationship is not strong, and teachers do not find the necessary support, the teamwork collapses and a 'blame game' begins."

- "Because the assistant principal is one of the worker bees on the campus, it is important that the assistant principal and the teachers have a relationship based on mutual trust and understanding of each other's roles. I find that an open-door policy works best to foster relationships and allow teachers to feel comfortable with their assistant principal."

- "Teachers must feel that the assistant principal is accessible and supportive. If the teachers feel supported, they will do whatever it takes to meet the needs of the school."

The first question contained 432 responses that fell into three main categories. The three categories the responses were placed in were respect and trust, leadership and support, and communication and visioning. Out of the 432 responses, 160 of the respondents stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement. One hundred forty-five respondents stated that support and leadership were critical in order to have a successful school. Ninety-four respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create positive relationships necessary for school improvement. The remaining 33 responses fell into three categories. Three respondents stated that successful relationships were necessary in order to see an improved campus culture; four respondents stated that having successful relationships made teachers feel empowered and improved school order, and three respondents stated that relationships are important in order to avoid teacher turnover. There were 20 respondents who stated that relationships were vitally important without giving a reason.

Table 4.1

Responses to Research Question One

Response	Number Responding	
The assistant principal/teacher relationship provides communication required for improved collaboration and visioning for the improvement of the school	160	37%
The assistant principal/teacher relationship provides leadership and support required for the improvement of the school	145	34%
The assistant principal/teacher relationship provides trust and respect necessary for successful relationships for school improvements	94	22%
All other responses	33	7%

The first question was broken down by the responses according to gender. Out of the 275 responses from female respondents, 105 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 97 respondents stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 73 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create positive relationships necessary for school improvement. The responses from the male counterparts were similar. Out of 120 responses from male respondents, 51 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 48 respondents stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 21 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create positive

relationships necessary for school improvement. Figure 1 shows the percentage of responses by gender.
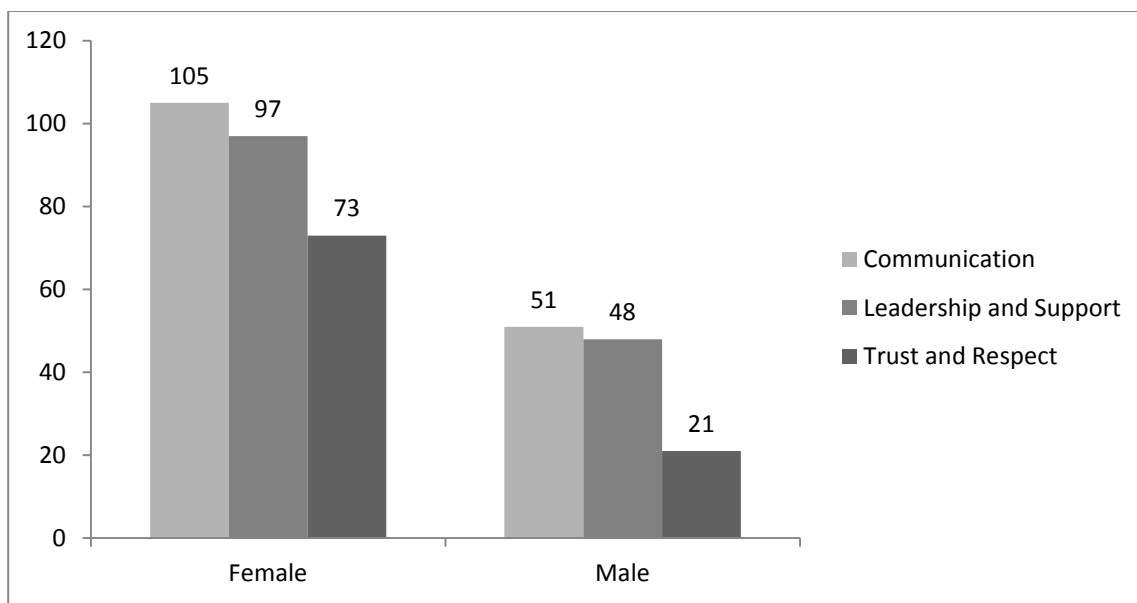

Figure 1. Responses to question 1 (by gender).

In addition, the first question was also broken down by the number of years of experience assistant principals had served in their roles. The categories were organized by three or fewer years of experience, between four and seven years of experience, eight to 15 years of experience, and 16 or more years.   Out of the 194 respondents with three years of experience or fewer , 75 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 80 respondents stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 39 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create positive relationships necessary for school improvement. Out of the 121 respondents that were placed in the category of four to seven years of experience category, 49 stated that

communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 35 respondents stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 27 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create positive relationships necessary for school improvement. Out of the 78 respondents who were placed in the eight to 15 years of experience category, 30 respondents stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 23 respondents stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 20 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement. The final years of experience category included assistant principals who had maintained the role for 16 years or more. This category only had 14 respondents since the assistant principal role is seen as a gateway to becoming a school principal. Of the 14 respondents, four stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; four stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and six respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement. Figure 2 shows the percentage for the frequency of the 391 responses who fell into each of the three categories.
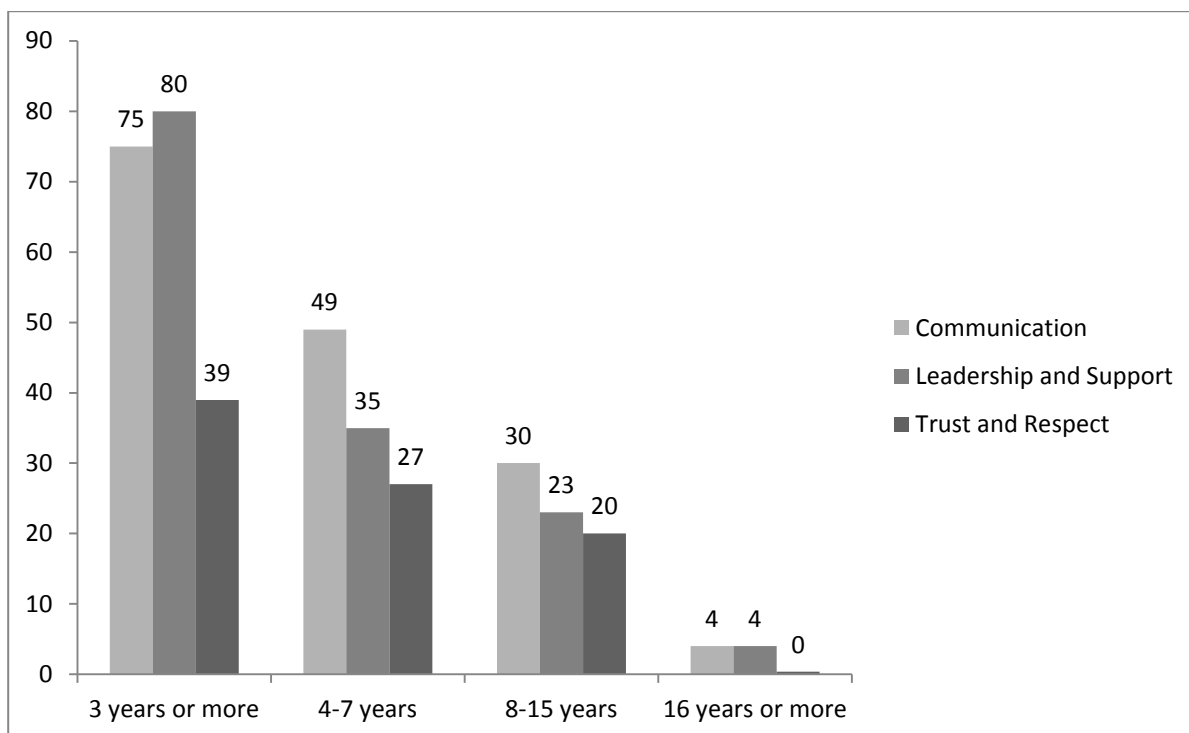
Figure 2. Responses to question 1 (by years of experience as assistant principal).

The first research question was also broken down by the type of accountability

rating that the respondents' schools received.   Of the total 363 responses, 35 came from

assistant principals working in exemplary schools, 105 from recognized schools, 205

from academically acceptable schools, and the final 18 came from academically

unacceptable schools. From the 35 responses from the assistant principals who worked

in exemplary schools, 15 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved

collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 10 stated that

leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 10

respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships

necessary for school improvement. From the 105 responses from assistant principals

who worked in recognized schools, 47 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for

improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 38 stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 20 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement. From the 205 responses from assistant principals who worked in academically acceptable schools, 74 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 79 stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 52 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement. From the 18 responses from assistant principals who worked in academically unacceptable schools, nine stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; six stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and three respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement. Figure 3 shows the percentages of responses that fell into the three categories when broken down by accountability rating.
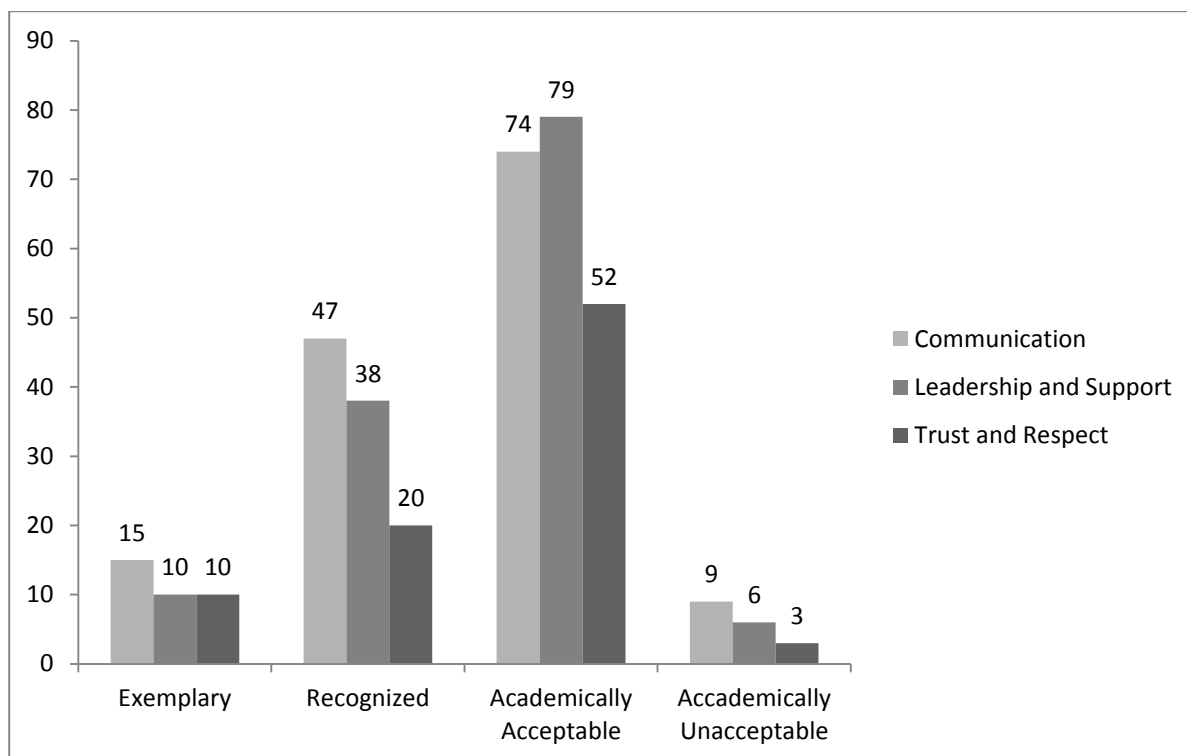
Figure 3. Responses to question 1 (by accountability rating).

The last category analyzed for the first research question was the type of school

the assistant principals worked in. The responses came from three types of schools:

urban, suburban, and rural.   Of the 400 total responses, 14 were from respondents who

worked in a rural setting; 177 respondents worked in a suburban setting, and 209

respondents worked in an urban setting.   Of the 14 respondents from rural settings,

three stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and

visioning that led to improved overall achievement; seven stated that leadership and

support were critical in order to have a successful school, and four respondents stated

that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school

improvement. From the 177 respondents in a suburban setting, 74 stated that

communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to

improved overall achievement; 67 stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 36 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement.   Of the 209 respondents whose schools were located in an urban setting, 83 stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 70 stated that leadership and support were critical in order to have a successful school, and 56 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create relationships necessary for school improvement. Figure 4 shows percentages of responses that fell into the main three categories by type of school.
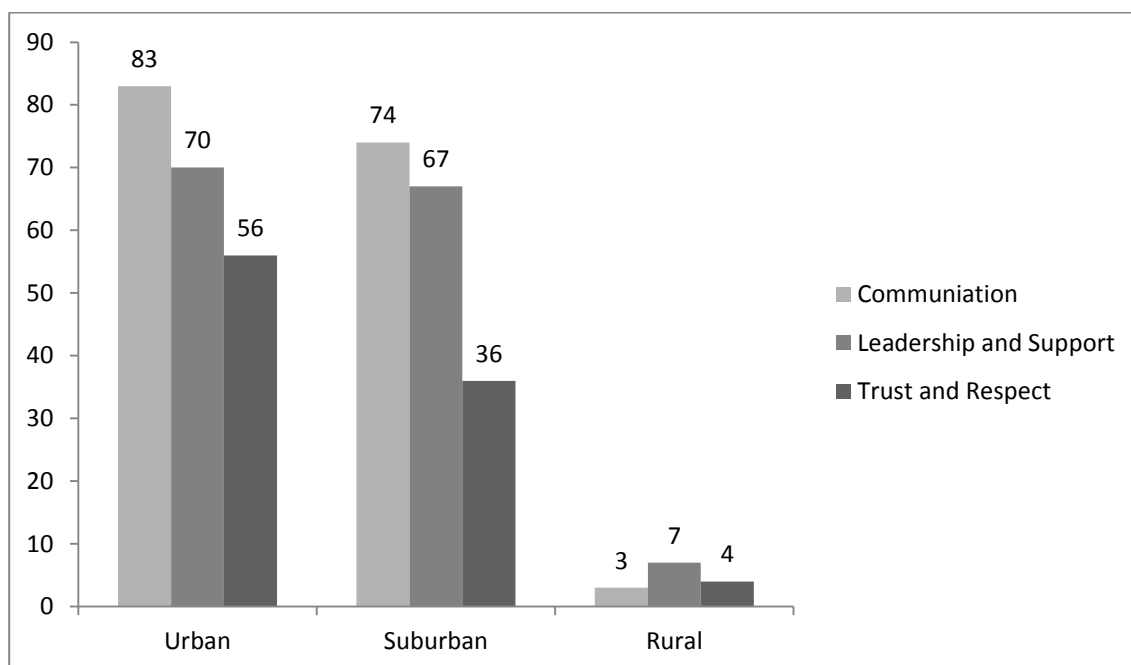

Figure 4. Responses to Question 1 (by type of school)

Research Question Two

For the question *"What is the most critical aspect of a successful relationship between assistant principals and teachers"* the respondents provided the following answers:

- "Trust, communication and best interest are the center stone of the relationship."

- "Open communication is the key. Always having an open door and understanding line of decision making. A great listener with compassion."

- "Commitment to developing and maintaining a successful working relationship on the parts of both teacher and principal. Honest, open, regular communication between teacher and principal."

- "It is important that the principal and the teachers understand each other. I also believe that teachers need to know that instruction is non-negotiable. Working on expectations and goals together is also important for building relationships, by working together as a faculty as much as possible. If you keep your communication open and flowing you can be a productive school."

- "The most critical feature is for the teacher to feel that the assistant principal supports them in discipline and instructional issues. The teacher should not abuse this relationship by sending too many students to the office."

- "The most important aspect is for the teacher to be able to trust the AP. If you build trust with teachers they will accept ideas and orders more readily. Make teachers realize that everything you do is for the benefit of kids."

- "Teachers need to know that they can trust their principal to be consistent in daily decisions. They also want clear, consistent instructions on expectations. They need to understand that the principal is a person who helps everyone grow without condemnation or negative outcomes. The relationship should be one of coaching rather than authorities and is mutual."

- "An open line of communication and a good understanding of business and friendship. Many times at a small school, administrators and teachers will gain a more personal relationship, but the understandings of the professional role each person plays must be completely understood."

- "Communication. The assistant principal must keep open lines of communication with the teachers at all times and keep them informed of any changes."

- "Trust. The principal must trust the teachers' ability to positively impact student learning. Actually, when the classroom door closes, the principal has no choice. Teachers trust that their principal will support them in their curricular needs, in their parent interactions, and in their student discipline."

- "The most critical feature is communication. The teachers must be specific about what kinds of support they need and the principal must be supportive and specific in helping teachers improve their practice."

The second research question elicited 440 responses that fell into three main categories that included communication, trust and respect, and support and leadership as the most important aspects of positive relationships between assistant principals and teachers. Of the 441 responses, 204 respondents stated that communication and collaboration were the most important aspects of successful relationships; 166 respondents stated that trust and respect were the most important aspect of successful relationships, and 70 respondents stated that support and leadership were the most important aspects of successful relationships. The remaining response did not answer the question and instead stated "relationships, relationships, relationships" as the answer to the second research question.

Table 4.2

Response to Research Question Two

The most critical aspect of a successful assistant principal	Number Responding	
Communicating regularly and improved visioning and collaboration	204	46%
Support and leadership	70	16%
Trust and respect	166	38%
All other responses	1	0%

The second research question was further analyzed by the rate of responses by gender. Of the 275 total responses from female respondents, 105 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; 97 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 73 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. One hundred thirty-one responses to the second research question came from males. Of the 131 males, 63 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; 18 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 50 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. Figure 5 shows the percentage of responses that fell into the three main categories by gender.
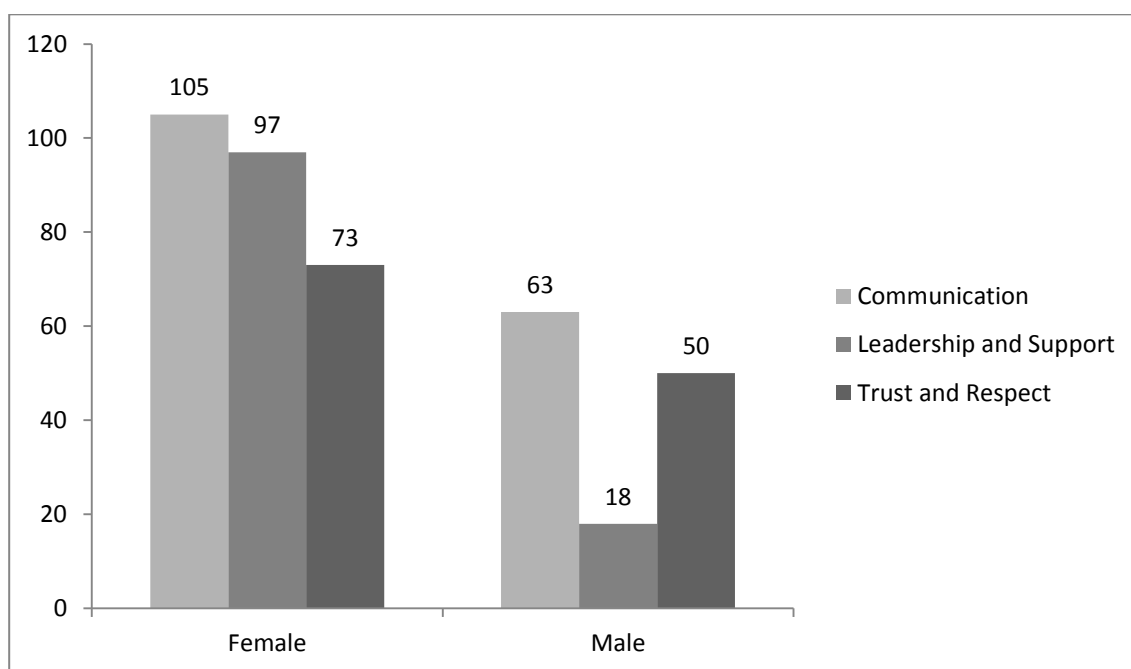

Figure 5. Responses to question 2 (by gender).

Question two was also broken down by years of experience. The categories ranged from zero to three years of experience, four to seven years of experience, eight to15 years of experience, and 16 years or more of experience. Out of the 222 responses that came from assistant principals with 3 years of experience or fewer, 104 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; 37 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 81 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. There were 122 responses from assistant principal that had between four and seven years of experience. Of those 122 responses, 63 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; 16 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 43 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. Respondents with eight to 15 years of experience as an assistant principal gave 72 responses within the three main categories. Of the 72 responses, 30 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; 13 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 29 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. There were only 13 responses from assistant principals with 16 years or more of experience as an assistant principal. Of those 13 responses, four stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively, two stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant

principal/teacher relationships, and seven stated that trust and respect were the most

important aspects of successful working relationships. Figure 6 shows the percentage

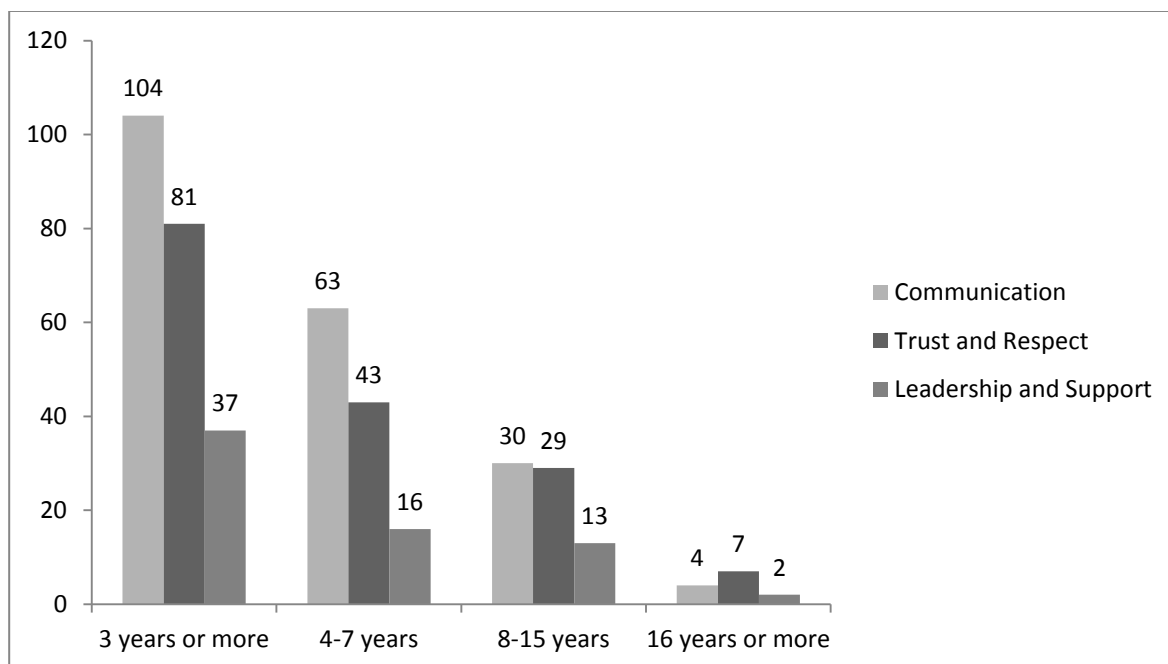of responses that fell into the three main categories by years of experience.

Figure 6. Responses to question 2 (by years of experience).

The second research question was also broken down by the type of

accountability rating that their respective schools received.   Of the total 403 responses,

42 came from exemplary schools, 120 from recognized schools, 218 from acceptable

schools, and 23 from schools rated unacceptable. From the 42 responses that came

from assistant principals who worked in exemplary schools, 21 stated that the most

critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; six

stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of successful assistant

principal/teacher relationships, and 15 stated that trust and respect were the most

important aspects of successful working relationships. From the 120 responses that

came from assistant principals who worked in recognized schools, 62 stated that the
most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating
effectively; 17 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspect of
successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 41 stated that trust and respect
were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. Of the 218
responses that came from assistant principals who worked in academically acceptable
schools, 96 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was
communicating effectively; 38 stated that leadership and support were the most critical
aspect of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 84 stated that trust and
respect were the most important aspect of successful working relationships. From the
23 responses that came from assistant principals who worked in academically
unacceptable schools, seven stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive
relationship was communicating effectively; five stated that leadership and support
were the most critical aspects of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and
11 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working
relationships. Figure 7 shows the percentage of responses that fell into the three main
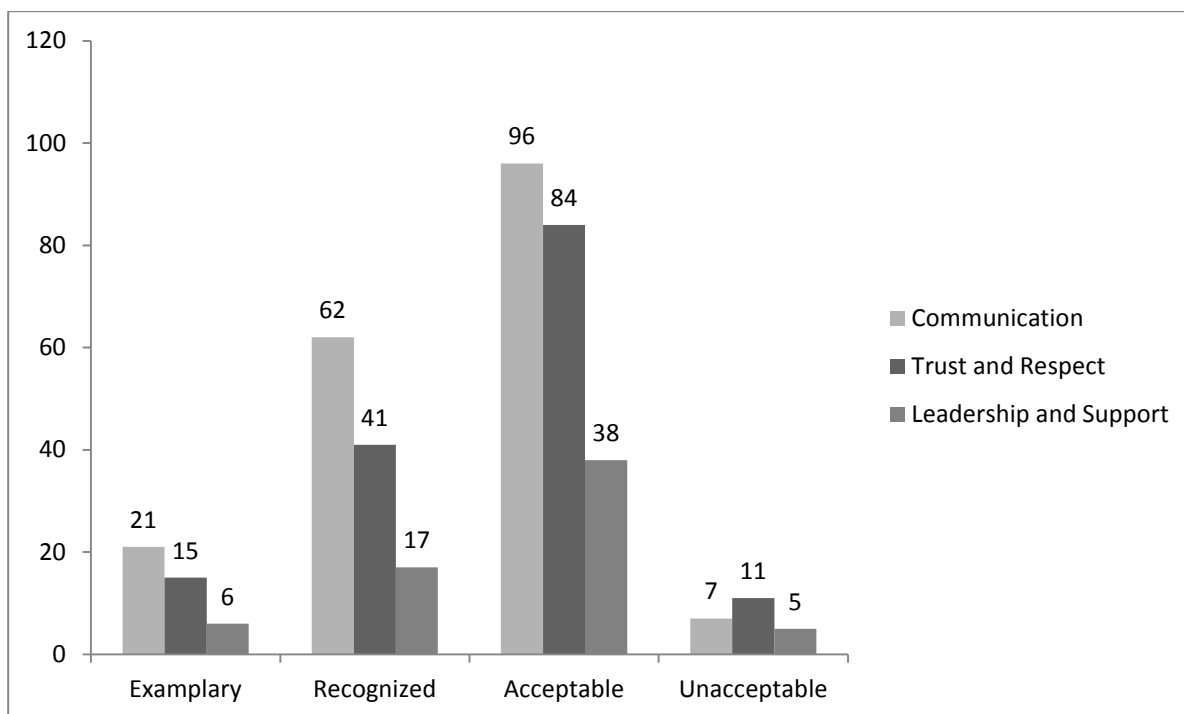categories by accountability rating.

Figure 7. Responses to question 2 (by accountability rating)

Lastly, the second research question was broken down by urbanicity. For this category, there were a total of 442 responses. Of the 442 responses, 232 came from assistant principals who worked in urban settings, 192 from suburban settings, and 18 from rural settings. Of the 232 responses from urban settings, 112 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; 35 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspects of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 85 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. Of the 192 responses from suburban settings, 87 stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively;34 stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspects of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 71 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working

relationships.   Of the 18 responses from rural settings, six stated that the most critical aspect of establishing a positive relationship was communicating effectively; two stated that leadership and support were the most critical aspects of successful assistant principal/teacher relationships, and 10 stated that trust and respect were the most important aspects of successful working relationships. Figure 8 shows the percentage of responses by urbanicity.
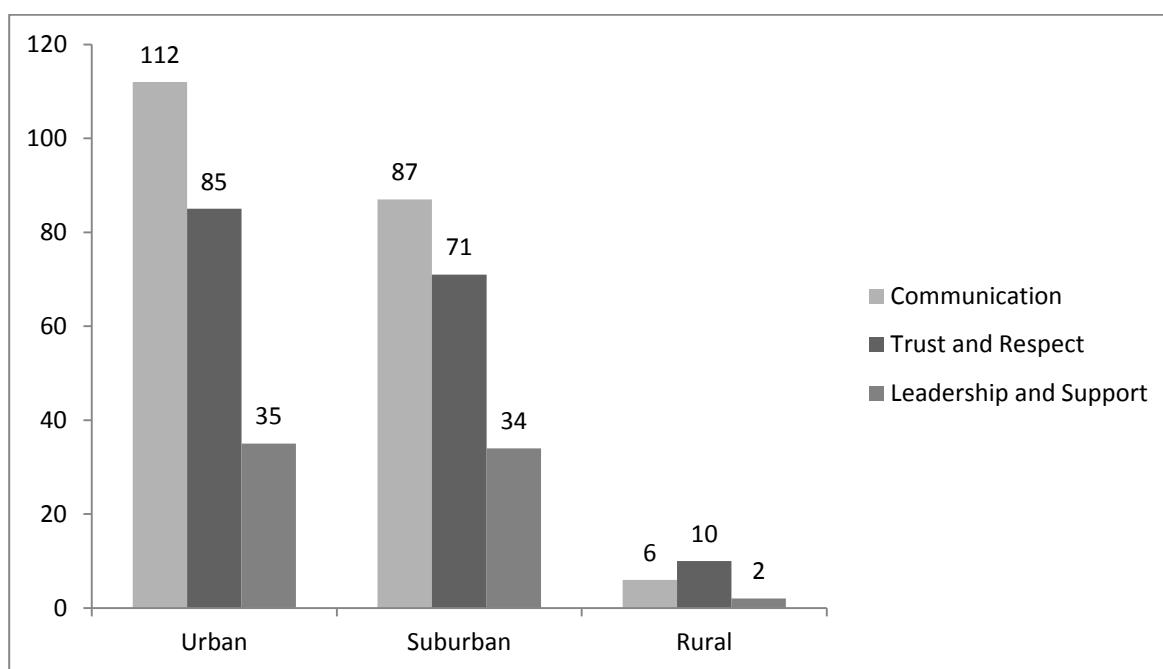

Figure 8. Responses to question 2 (by urbanicity)

Research Question Three

For the question *"What do assistant principals do to create good relationships with their teachers?"* the respondents provided the following answers:

- "I am here for them. I am a supporter. As a teacher, you support students and to some extent parents. When you become an assistant principal, your focus widens. You support students, parents AND teachers."
- "Communicate with teachers."

- "Take a personal interest in each staff member; validate them; model a high standard at all times; don't make "blanket" statements. Allow autonomy; high expectations for themselves, the teachers and the students."

- "Show respect regardless; uses appropriate talk and establishes fun relationships. My teachers know that I am a resource for them."

- "I talk to them on a personal level as often as I can. When we had our first meeting, I told them that. I told them I am here to help them. I will listen to them, but I will have to prioritize. With a campus this size, they have a lot of needs. I make it a point to know something about each one of them. I try to get on a personal level with them."

- "I am friendly; I realize they are human and have families; I talk to them; I empathize with them."

- "Communicate regularly. Always try to be visible and supportive."

- "Provide myself as a support person, while at the same time being a voice for the whole and leading others in a specific direction."

- "Visit classroom on a regular basis, acknowledge their accomplishments, and provide classroom resources and support as needed."

- "Communication is essential. The ability to listen is also crucial."

- "To create a good relationship with the teachers you need to always be professional and respectful. The golden rule always applies. Also, need to celebrate the successes and discuss the obstacles to work through them."

The third research question elicited 420 responses that fell into three categories.

Of the 420 responses, 193 respondents stated that they exhibit strong communication

skills in order to create successful relationships; 173 stated that they exhibit strong

leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 39 stated that they exhibit

trust and respect in order to create successful relationships. The remaining 15 responses

were varied. Eight out of the 15 responses mentioned that maintaining a positive

attitude was important to create successful relationships; two responses indicated that

making school fun was important to create successful relationships, and another two

respondents stated that they do nothing to create successful relationships. Of the

remaining three responses, one mentioned accepting criticism, another sated that not

becoming involved in personal matters, and the last one mentioned doing "whatever it takes" to create a successful relationship with teachers.

Table 4.3

Responses to Research Question Three

What assistant principals do to create successful working relationships with teachers	Number Responding	
Demonstrate Effective Communication	193	46%
Demonstrate Strong Support and Leadership	173	41%
Demonstrate Trust and Respect	39	9%
All other responses	15	4%

The third research question was broken down by gender of respondents. Of the 279 female respondents, 130 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 123 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 26 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers.

Of the 120 male respondents, 59 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 49 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 12 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers. Figure 9 shows the percentage of responses by gender.
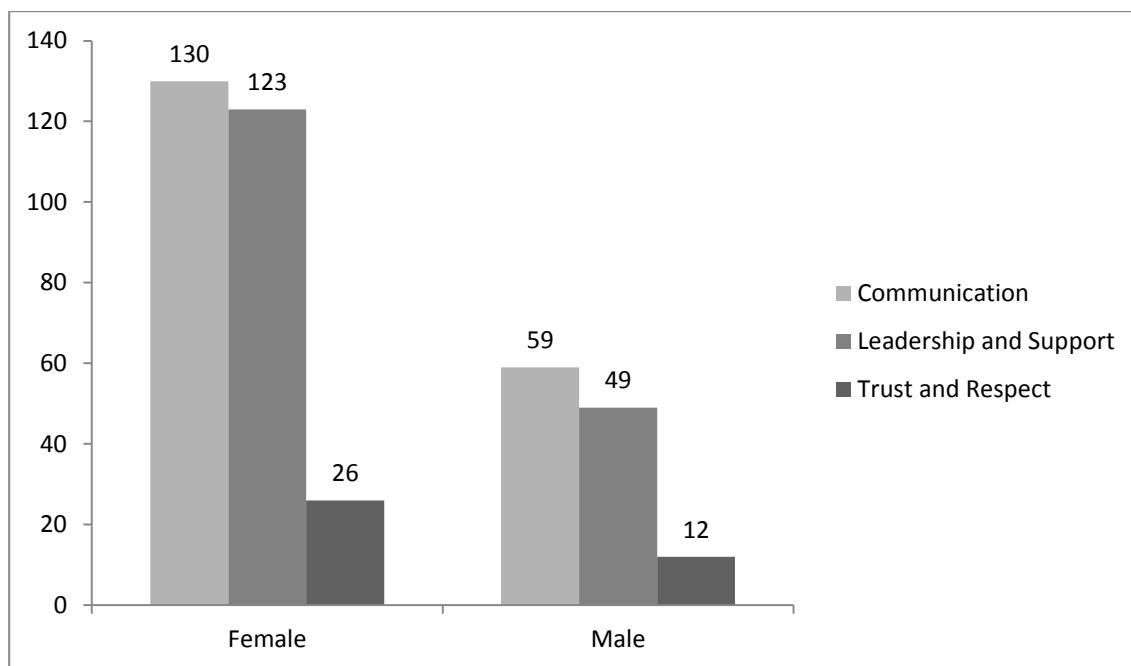
Figure 9. Responses for question 3 (by gender).

The third question was also broken down by the years of experience that respondents had as assistant principals. Of the 398 total responses, 208 came from assistant principals with fewer than three years of experience; 106 came from assistant principals with four to seven years of experience; 69 came from assistant principals with eight to 15 years of experience, and 15 responses came from assistant principals with 16 or more years of experience. From the 208 responses of assistant principals with three or fewer years of experience, 94 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 96 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 18 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers. Of the 106 responses from assistant principals with four to seven years of experience, 53 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful

relationships; 42 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create

successful relationships, and 11 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order

to create successful relationships with teachers.   Of the 69 responses from assistant

principals with eight to 15 years of experience, 35 stated that they demonstrated

effective communication to create successful relationships; 28 stated that they

demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and six

stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships

with teachers.   Of the 15 responses from assistant principals with 16 years or more of

experience, seven stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create

successful relationships; five stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and

support to create successful relationships. Figure 10 shows the percentage of responses

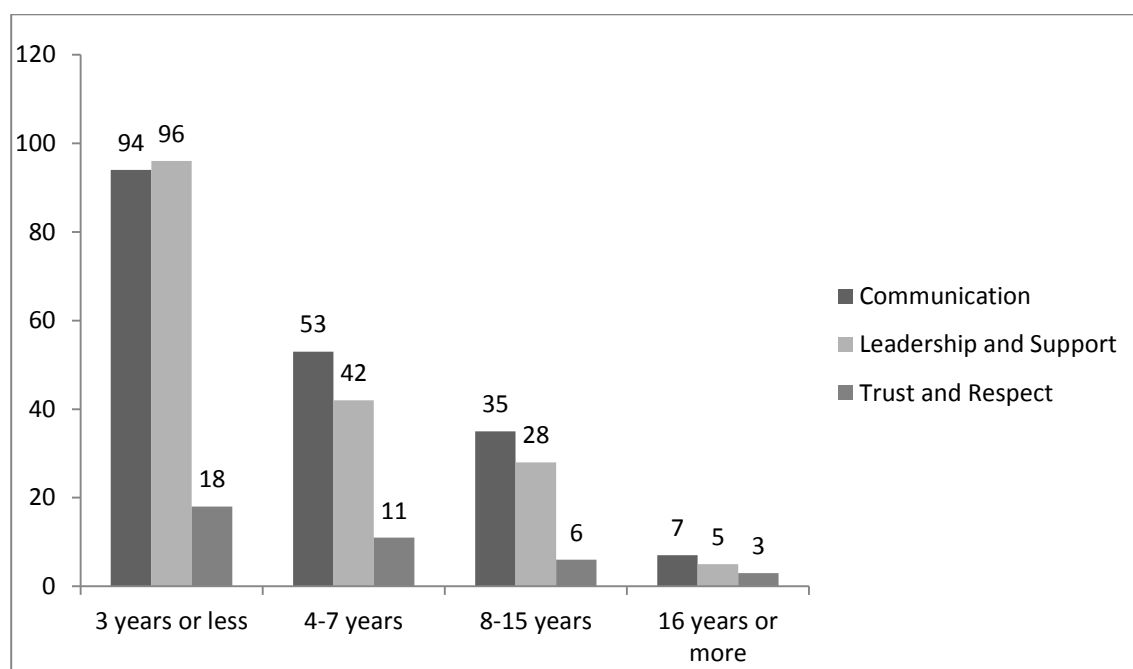by the years of experience assistant principals had.

Figure 10. Responses to question 3 (by years of experience).

The third sub-category of the third question was how respondents from school with different accountability ratings answered. Of of the 368 responses, 34 came from assistant principals working in exemplary schools; 103 worked in recognized schools; 207 worked in academically acceptable schools, and 24 worked in academically unacceptable schools. Of the 34 responses that came from assistant principals in exemplary schools, 13 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 17 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and four stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers. Of the 103 responses that came from assistant principals in recognized schools, 43 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 50 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 10 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers. Of the 207 responses that came from assistant principals in academically acceptable schools, 106 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 84 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 17 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers. Of the 24 responses that came from assistant principals in academically unacceptable schools, 11 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 11 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and two stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order

to create successful relationships with teachers. Figure 11 shows the responses by the accountability rating of the schools where the assistant principals worked.
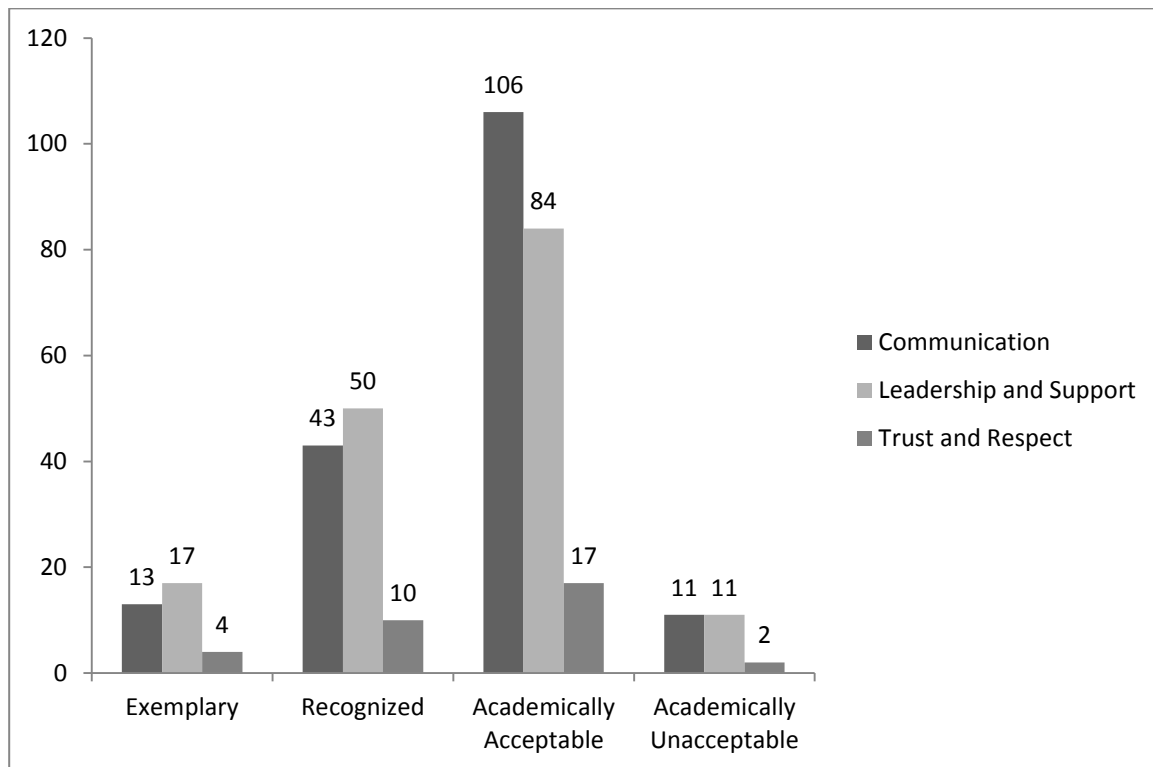

Figure 11. Responses to question 3 (by accountability rating).

The last sub-category of the third question was the urbanicity of the schools where the assistant principals worked.   Of the 408 total responses, 212 came from assistant principals who worked in urban settings; 182 came from assistant principals who worked in suburban settings, and only 14 came from assistant principals who worked in rural settings. From the 212 responses from respondents who worked in urban settings, 113 stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful relationships; 79 stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 20 stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships with teachers. Of the 182 responses from

respondents who worked in suburban settings, 81 stated that they demonstrated

effective communication to create successful relationships; 83 stated that they

demonstrated strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 18

stated that they demonstrated trust and respect in order to create successful relationships

with teachers. Of the 14 responses from respondents who worked in rural settings, four

stated that they demonstrated effective communication to create successful

relationships; nine stated that they demonstrated strong leadership and support to create

successful relationships, and one stated demonstrating trust and respect in order to

create successful relationships with teachers. Figure 12 shows the responses to question
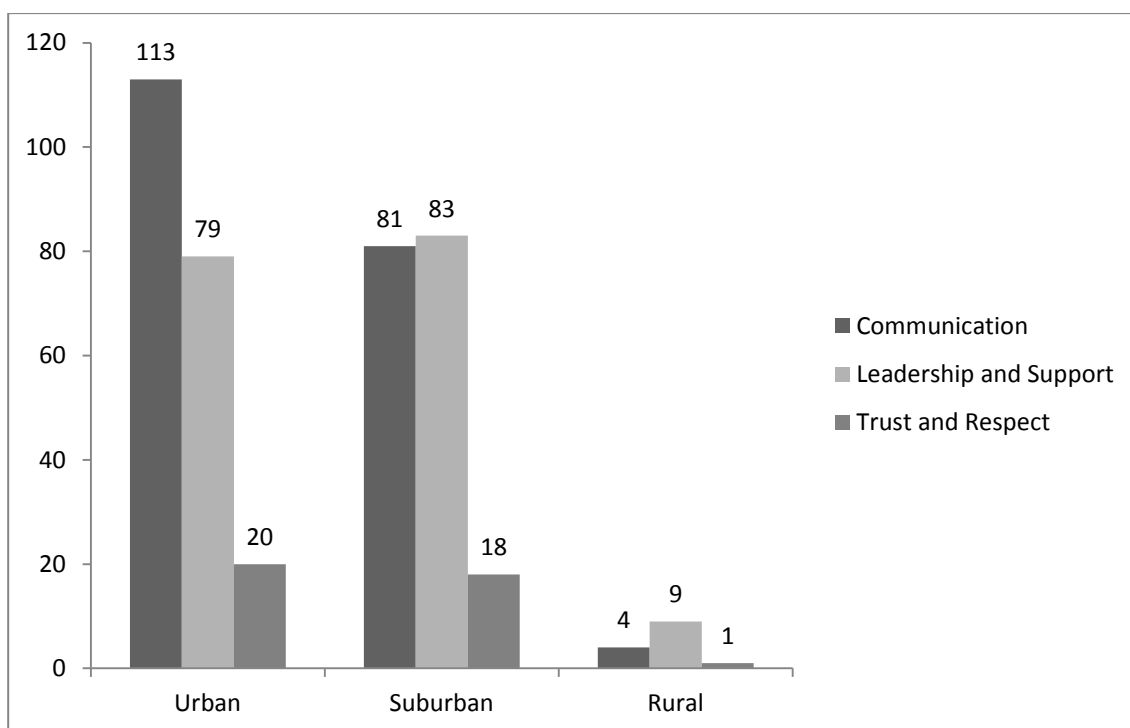
three by urbanicity.

Figure 12. Responses to question 3 (by urbanicity)

Research Question Four

For the question *"How do assistant principals look out for the welfare of their teachers?"*

- "I ask them about their personal life. I try to see if they look tired. If I can observe them during a down-time—when they are not teaching, for example, I ask them if they are alright. Affirmations are important.   Teachers need positive feedback. Positive notes are very good."

- "Absolutely!!! I care about my teachers and what goes on with them outside the school doors. If they are having issues outside of school that I can help with, I'm the first to offer help. A happy teacher makes a more productive teacher. I always ask how a person is feeling if they have missed school and just show that I care."

- "Communicate with them regularly."

- "As far as humanly possible, I ask about issues in and outside of school which affect their lives at school. I call them at home; send cards when they are sick, etc."

- "I look out for the personal welfare of the teacher first. Even though the student is the most important stakeholder, if the teacher is not confident and mentally safe, the students will be harmed."

- "The personal welfare is one of the most important aspects of the asst. principal's job. I continuously check up on teacher's home life, personal issues, and health situations. A teacher who is 100 percent outside of the school can usually give 100 in the classroom. Also a teacher who feels that the administration will support them and not ask to place them in harm's way, will go out for the school more regularly."

- "To an extent. School is not a place for counseling, but I do remain open and friendly."

- "By showing a genuine interest in their life and whatever situation they may be going through."

- "Yes. I am always available to discuss matters of teacher concern."

- "Yes! I listen to them and understand their issues. Taking teacher aside and seeing if they need someone to talk to."

The fourth question contained 358 total responses that fell into one of two categories. The respondents indicated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally and by communicating with their teachers regularly to be aware of their needs. Of the 358 total responses, 278 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 60 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. The remaining 20 responses fell into four categories. Eight respondents stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers but did not specify a reason; five respondents simply stated that they do not look out for the welfare of their teachers; four stated that they look out for the teachers' welfare by not overworking them, and three stated they protect their privacy.

Table 4.4

Reponses to Research Question Four

Response What assistant principals do to look out for the welfare of their teachers	Number Responding	
Support Teachers' Professional and Personal Lives	278	78%
Communicate with Teachers Regularly	60	17%
All other responses	20	5%

The fourth research question was further analyzed by gender. Of the total 334 responses that fell into one of two categories, 236 came from females and 98 from males. Of the 236 responses from females, 194 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by supporting their professional and personal lives, and 42 stated that they look out for their teachers' welfare by communicating with them regularly. Of the

98 responses from males, 81 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by supporting their professional and personal lives, and 17 stated that they look out for their teachers' welfare by communicating with them regularly. Figure 13 shows the responses to question four by gender.
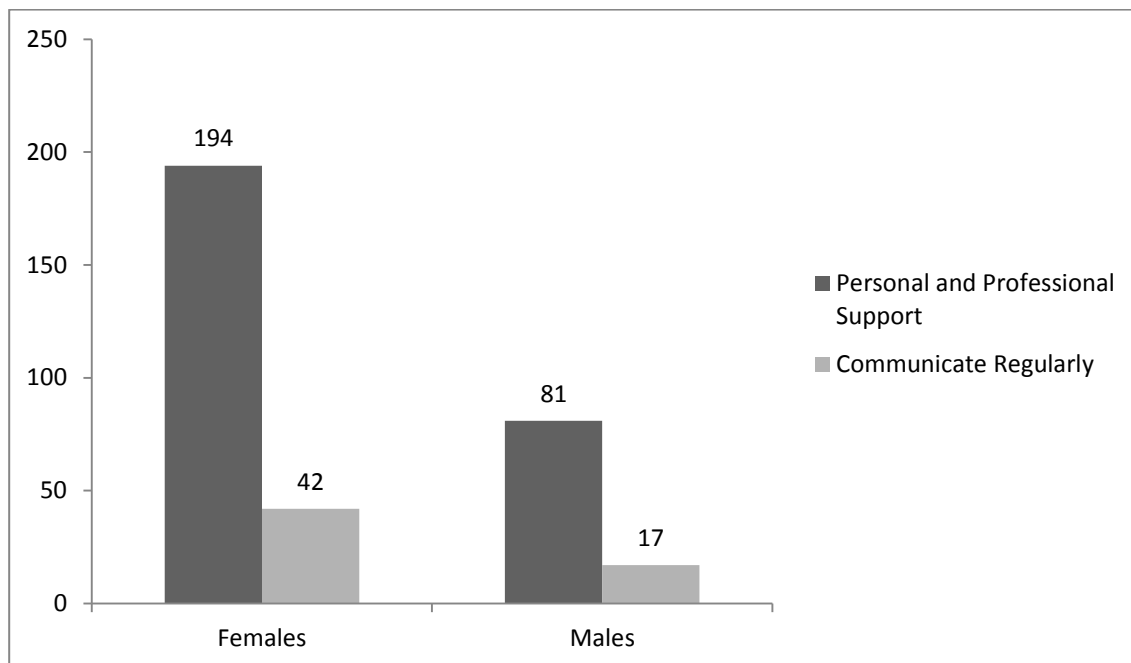

Figure 13. Responses to question 4 (by gender).

The fourth research question was also analyzed by the respondents' years of practice as an assistant principal. The categories were organized by three or fewer years of experience, between four and seven years of experience, eight to 15 years of experience, and 16 or more years of experience. From the total 331 responses, 170 came from assistant principals with three years of experience or fewer; 94 from assistant principals with four to seven years of experience; 56 cane from assistant principals with eight to 15 years of experience, and 11 came from assistant principals with 16 years of experience or more. Of the 170 responses from assistant principals

with three years of experience or fewer, 137 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 33 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Of the 94 responses from assistant principals with four to seven years of experience, 80 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 14 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Of the 56 responses from assistant principals with eight to 15 years of experience, 47 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and nine stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Of the 11 responses from assistant principals with 16 years of experience or more, seven stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and four stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Figure 14 shows the responses to question four by assistant principal years of experience.
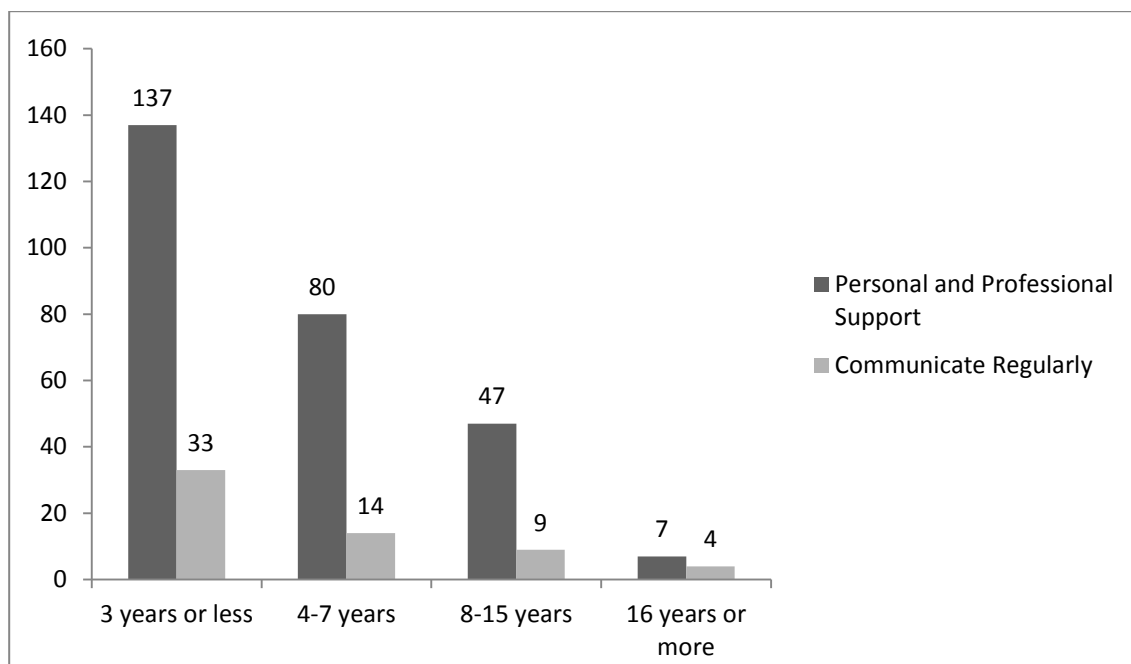
Figure 14. Responses to question 4 (by years of experience).

In addition to the years of experience, the fourth question was also analyzed

based on the accountability rating that the assistant principals' campuses received. The

categories for accountability rating were exemplary, recognized, academically

acceptable, and academically unacceptable. From the total 307 responses, 30 came

from assistant principals in exemplary schools; 88 came from assistant principals in

recognized schools; 170 came from assistant principals in academically recognized

schools, and 19 came from academically unacceptable schools. Of the 30 responses

from assistant principals in exemplary schools, 24 stated that they look out for their

teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and six stated that they look

out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Of

the 88 responses from assistant principals in recognized schools, 76 stated that they look

out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 12 stated

that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication.   Of the 170 responses from assistant principals in academically acceptable schools, 138 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 32 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication.   Of the 19 responses from assistant principals in academically unacceptable schools, 15 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and four stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Figure 15 shows the responses to question four by the accountability rating that the respondents' respective campuses received.
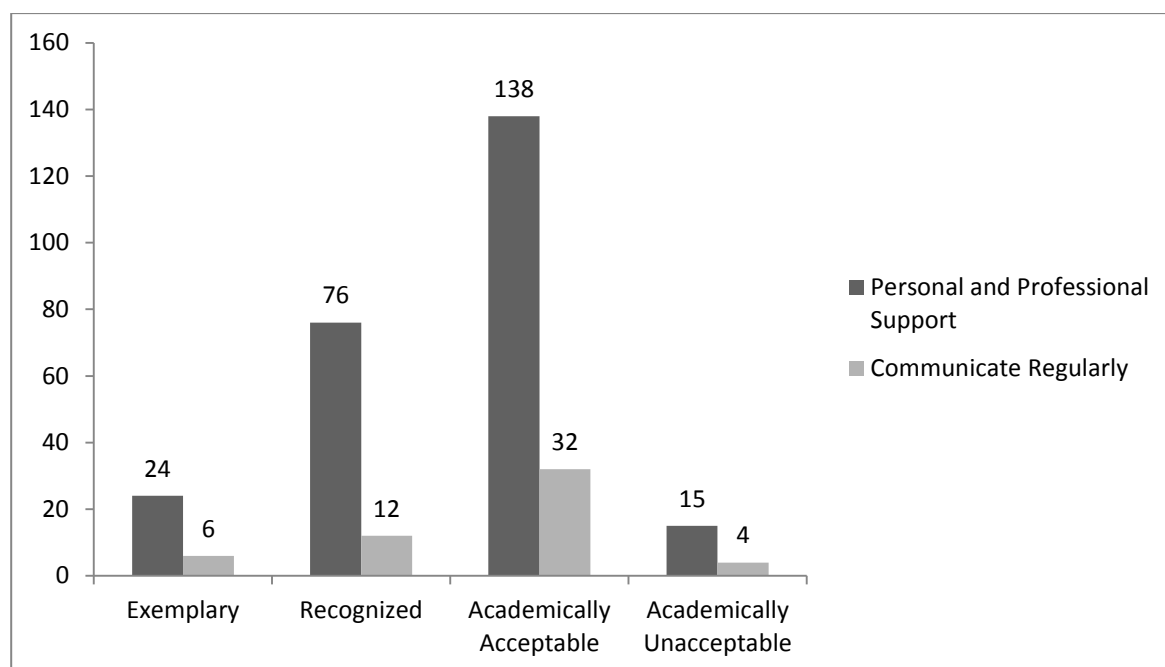

Figure 15. Responses to question 4 (by accountability rating).

The fourth research question was also analyzed by the urbanicity of the schools where the assistant principals worked. The three categories for urbanicity were urban,

suburban, and rural. From the total 310 responses, 176 came from assistant principals in urban schools; 123responses came from assistant principals in suburban schools, and only 11 came from rural schools.   Of the 176 responses from assistant principals in urban schools, 147 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 29 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Out of the 123 responses from assistant principals in suburban schools, 123 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 31 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Out of the 11 responses from assistant principals in rural areas, nine stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and two stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. Figure 16 shows the responses to question four by the urbanicity of the schools where the assistant principals worked.
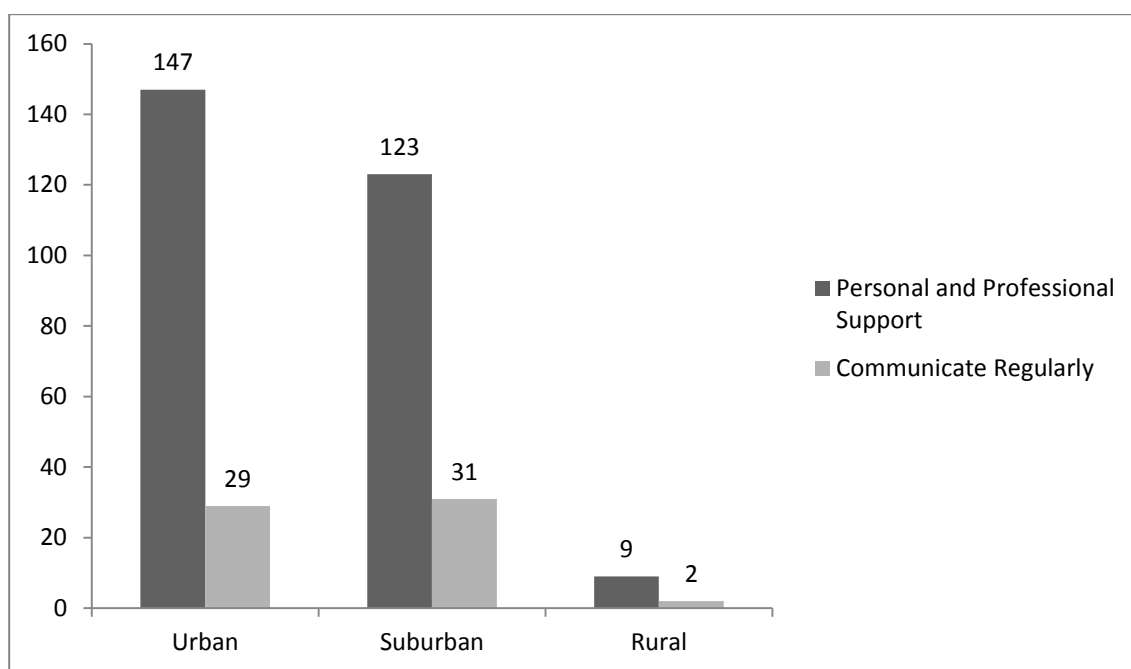
Figure 16. Responses to question 4 (by urbanicity).

Summary

The following is a summary of the results of all the responses for each individual question. In research question number one, 37% of assistant principals believed that the relationships between teachers and them were important because it fostered effective communication leading to collaboration; 34% believed they were important because it led to leadership and support, and 22% believed they were important because it enhanced trust and respect. The remaining 7% stated reasons that revolved around school culture, feelings of empowerment, and increase morale to avoid teacher turnover.

In research question number two, 46% of assistant principals believed that communication and collaboration were the most important aspects of successful relationships; 38% believed that trust and respect were the most important aspect of

successful relationships, and 16% believed leadership and support were the most important aspects of successful relationships.

In research question three, 46% stated that they demonstrate effective communication to create successful relationships; 41% stated that they demonstrate strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 9% stated that they exhibit trust and respect in order to create successful relationships. The remaining 4% stated that in order to create successful relationship with teachers, they have a positive attitude, they make school fun, and accept constructive criticism.

In the last research question, 78% stated that they look out for their teachers' welfare by supporting their personal and professional lives, and 17% stated that they look out for their teachers] welfare by communicating with them regularly. The remaining 5% of respondents stated that they look out for the welfare of the teachers by respecting their privacy, by not overworking them, and others mentioned their support without specifying a reason.

The theme with the highest frequency of responses in the first three research questions was communication. The assistant principals participating in this study stated that communication was a critical aspect of building and maintaining positive working relationships because it improved collaboration among colleagues and helped promote a common vision among the staff.

The second theme that surfaced from the survey responses was leadership and support. Assistant principals stated that leadership and support were an important foundation of the relationships between the teachers and them. The following response exemplifies the need for leadership and support: "The teacher needs to be able to count

on the assistant principal for support and needs to feel comfortable in order to ask or accept that help." Many of the responses indicated that assistant principals must be able to support the teachers by providing the necessary professional development, moral support, and leadership needed to work towards a common goal.

The third and final themes that emerged out of the assistant principals' responses were trust and respect. According to the respondents, trust and respect were very important in order to have positive relationships with their teachers. The following response from the survey exemplifies the need for trust: "The most critical feature is the trust in a relationship. It's important for the assistant principal and the teacher to believe in each other and stick up for each other."

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived importance that assistant principals place in their relationships with teachers. Since assistant principals play a vital role in the overall functioning of schools, it is important that assistant principals and teachers work together to increase student achievement and overall school success. In order to achieve optimal collaboration in schools, there must be strong positive relationships among assistant principals and teachers. This study provides critical information about what assistant principals do to create positive professional relationships with their teachers.

To achieve the purpose of the study, assistant principal responses from one section of a large survey were analyzed. The section involving this study contained four questions that were collected using a cognitive interview protocol. The data were collected by students earning a master's degree from a large research university in the greater Houston area. Each of the four questions were analyzed by gender, years of practice, accountability rating, and urbanicity of the schools were the assistant principals worked.

The conclusions of this study emanate from the assistant principal responses to the following four questions: (1) Why is the relationship between assistant principals and teachers important for the school? (2) What is the most critical feature for a successful working relationship between assistant principals and teachers? (3) What do

assistant principals do to create good relationships with their teachers? And, (4) how do assistant principals look out for the welfare of their teachers?

Research Question One

The first research question prompted assistant principals to discuss the importance they place on the relationships they have with teachers in relation to the overall success of their respective schools. The 432 responses to the first question fell into three categories. The three categories the responses were placed in were respect and trust, leadership and support, and communication and visioning.   Of the 432 responses, 160 of the respondents stated that communicating efficiently allowed for improved collaboration and visioning that led to improved overall achievement; 145 respondents stated that support and leadership were critical in order to have a successful school, and 94 respondents stated that trust and respect were necessary to create positive relationships necessary for school improvement. The remaining 33 responses fell into three categories. Three respondents stated that successful relationships were necessary in order to see an improved campus culture; four respondents stated that having successful relationships made teachers feel empowered and improved school order, and three respondents stated that relationships are important in order to avoid teacher turnover. There were 20 respondents who stated that relationships were vitally important without giving a reason.

In spite of the large number of responses presented by assistant principals, the vast majority of the responses fell into one of three categories. The respondents in this study indicated that relationships between assistant principals are critical, in terms of the overall importance for the school for the following three reasons: they facilitate

communication that is necessary to improve collaboration and carry out the school's vision; they allow for the necessary leadership and support that drives school progress, and they set the foundation of trust and respect that is critical for a healthy school culture. The order in which the three categories were mentioned signified the order of importance. The frequencies of responses were consistent across the four demographic factors that were analyzed in this study.

Research Question Two

In the second research question, respondents were asked to identify the most critical component of effective and positive relationships with their teachers. This research question elicited 440 responses that fell into three main categories, which included communication, trust and respect, and support and leadership as the most important aspects of positive relationships between assistant principals and teachers. Of the 441 responses, 204 respondents stated that communication and collaboration were the most important aspects of successful relationships; 166 respondents stated that trust and respect were the most important aspect of successful relationships, and 70 respondents stated that support and leadership were the most important aspects of successful relationships. The remaining response did not answer the question and instead stated "relationships, relationships, relationships" as the answer to the second research question.

The three main categories that emerged in the first research question were also present in the second. The only difference being that the frequency of responses did not follow the same order. In the second research question, the plurality of responses signaled that the most important feature for a successful working relationship was

communicating regularly for improved visioning and collaboration. Trust and respect were the second most frequent responses followed by support and leadership. When the responses were further analyzed by demographic factors (gender, experience, accountability rating, and urbanicity), the categories in which the responses fell into was fairly consistent.

Research Question Three

The third research question prompted assistant principals to discuss what they do to create successful relationship with teachers. This question elicited 420 responses that fell into three categories. Of the 420 total responses, 193 respondents stated that they exhibit strong communication skills in order to create successful relationships; 173 stated that they exhibit strong leadership and support to create successful relationships, and 39 stated that they exhibit trust and respect in order to create successful relationships. The remaining 15 responses were varied. Eight of 15 responses mentioned that maintaining a positive attitude was important to create successful relationships; two responses indicated that making school fun was important to create successful relationships, and another two responses stated that they do not do anything to create successful relationships. Of the remaining three responses, one mentioned accepting criticism, another stated not becoming involved in personal matters, and the last one mentioned that they do "whatever it takes" to create a successful relationship with teachers.

Again, the responses from the assistant principals fell under the same three categories with the plurality of responses falling under the category of demonstrating effective communication. Most respondents indicated that in order to create successful

relationships, they demonstrate effective communication. Demonstrating leadership and support was the second most cited category with demonstrating trust and respect coming in third. An interesting pattern has emerged that shows that assistant principals deem communication, leadership and support, and trust and respect as extremely important in order to have the assistant principal/teacher relationships that benefit schools. The rate of responses for each category was also fairly consistent across the demographic data (gender, experience, accountability rating, and urbanicity) in which the third question was further analyzed.

Research Question Four

In the last research question in this study, assistant principals were prompted to state what they do to look out for the welfare of their teachers. The fourth question contained 358 total responses that fell into one of two categories. The respondents indicated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally and by communicating with their teachers regularly to be aware of their needs. Of the 358 total responses, 278 stated that they look out for their teachers by supporting them personally and professionally, and 60 stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers by maintaining an open line of communication. The remaining 20 responses fell into four categories. Eight respondents stated that they look out for the welfare of their teachers but did not specify a reason; five respondents simply stated that they do not look out for the welfare of their teachers, and four stated that they look out for the teachers' welfare by not overworking them, and three stated they protect their privacy.

Unlike the first three research questions, the last research question prompted responses that fell into only two categories. The two categories that were represented in the fourth research question were professional and personal support, and communicating regularly with their teachers to be aware of their needs. The vast majority of the responses fell under providing professional and personal support for teachers. In line with the first three research questions, the responses to the fourth question were fairly consistent across the assistant principal demographic data.

Summary

A very important and interesting aspect of this study is that the vast majority of the responses from the assistant principals surveyed fell into three main themes. The themes that emerged from the four research questions were consistent throughout all of the combined responses.

The theme with the highest frequency of responses in the first three research questions was communication. The assistant principals participating in this study stated that communication was a critical aspect of building and maintaining positive working relationships because it improved collaboration among colleagues and helped promote a common vision among the staff. This finding is consistent with the literature about the importance of communication in organizations. Katz and Kahn (1978) indicated that communication is the "essence of organizations." Assistant principals have a very challenging and demanding job. They are responsible for aiding in the implementation of new initiatives, setting and monitoring goals, and making decisions. In addition, assistant principals direct staff, organize events, lead instructional programs, and plan staff development (Weller & Weller, 2002). Without the use of effective

communication, these tasks would be very difficult to accomplish. A conclusion that can be made is that communication is the lynchpin of successful organizations. This idea is supported by Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) when they stated, "Communication, the lifeblood of every school organization, is a process that links the individual, the group, and the organization." Barnard (1938) further supports the importance of communication in organizations by stating that "the structure, extensiveness, and scope of organizations are almost entirely determined by communication techniques."

The second theme that surfaced from the survey responses was leadership and support. Assistant principals stated that leadership and support were an important foundation of the relationships between the teachers and them. The following response exemplifies the need for leadership and support: "The teacher needs to be able to count on the assistant principal for support and needs to feel comfortable in order to ask or accept that help." Many of the responses indicated that assistant principals must be able to support the teachers by providing the necessary professional development, moral support, and leadership needed to work towards a common goal. In his book titled *School Morale*, Marc Robert (1976) reinforces the importance of teacher support by stating the following: "Educators who have been struggling during the past decade to improve relationships between teachers and students have met with relatively little success because they have not paid attention to the relationships among the adults who work in the schools. I believe that no great 'humanization' breakthrough between student and teacher will occur unless an organized and concerted effort is made to develop and maintain some realistic human support systems in which staff members can

help each other to feel good about their personal and professional effectiveness."

Providing adequate support for teachers is a quality of an effective leader. The presence

of an effective leader in schools has been correlated with gains in student achievement.

A meta-analysis conducted by Waters and Cameron (2007) revealed that school

leadership and student achievement was correlated by a factor of .25. In other words,

an increase in one standard deviation of leadership behaviors would be equivalent to a

10 percentile point difference in a norm-referenced test. The frequency of responses

that indicated the importance of leadership and support in this study are consistent with

the importance the prevalent literature places on leadership and support.

The third and final themes that emerged out of the assistant principal's responses

were trust and respect. According to the respondents, trust and respect were very

important in order to have positive relationships with their teachers. The following

response from the survey exemplifies the need for trust: "The most critical feature is the

trust in a relationship. It's important for the assistant principal and the teacher to

believe in each other and stick up for each other." A plethora of studies have shown the

importance that these two values play in the overall functioning of successful schools.

Researchers Bryk and Schneider (2002) agree that trust has an important impact on

student achievement by stating that, "A strong base of relational trust lubricates much of

a school's day-to-day functioning and is a critical resource as local leaders embark on

ambitious education reforms." In addition Willie (2000) states the following to

explain the meaning of trust:

> Trust is based on reliable evidence that the other accepts one as one is
>
> before attempting to initiate change in behavior, that the other respects

one's whole being and is interested in one beyond a specific utilitarian

purpose. When the other, by word and action, demonstrates that one has

been accepted just as one is, the accepted person or group can depend on

the other without fear of betrayal. This is the essence of trust, depending

on others without fear that they will take advantage of one's weaknesses.

Additionally, Covey (1991) emphasized that when trust is built, colleagues perceive the

work environment in favorable terms. Having a positive perception or attitude towards

one's workplace could help to lessen the burden of the increasing demands of higher

accountability and testing. Sosik and Dionne (1997) also stated that creating trusting

relationships is dependent upon leaders instilling faith into the followers by exhibiting

important values such as integrity, honesty, and openness. The responses from the

surveyed assistant principals coincide with the findings of the researchers just

mentioned.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is widely known that the topic of assistant principals is an area that receives

very little attention in the overall sphere of education journals, books, and other

publications. The voice of the assistant principal is a very important one since they play

a crucial role in the daily operation of schools. This study gives a clear voice to what

assistant principals perceive as the most important aspects of relationships with teachers

and what they do to create them; however, this study does not reflect the opinions of

teachers. A relationship consists of at least two individuals and this study seeks the

perception of only one. The findings from undertaking a similar study that prompts

teachers with the same four research questions would be very beneficial. A study of

this nature would be able to produce its own set of emerging themes. It would be

interesting to find what those themes would be and how they would compare to the

findings of this study.

Another recommendation would be to use quantitative analysis on the frequency

of responses from each of the four sub-categories (gender, experience, accountability

rating, and urbanicity) that were used to analyze each research question. It would be

interesting to see whether there was any statistical significance in the distribution of the

male and female responses. In fact, it would be interesting to determine if there were

any statistical significance of the distribution of responses from all four demographic

factors.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings in this study indicate that communication, leadership and support,

and trust and respect are crucial in building and maintaining positive working

relationships between assistant principals and teachers. The three themes that emerged

could be integrated into courses in principal preparation programs. Principal

preparation programs usually require aspiring assistant principals to participate in a

semester long internship in which they are paired with a mentor to acquire the

knowledge necessary to perform the job adequately. As aspiring assistant principals go

through the semester long internship, it would be very beneficial to engage in specific

activities that would improve their ability to communicate effectively, lead and support,

and build trust and respect. These types of activities could be monitored by the

supervising professors to ensure that the aspiring assistant principals have the correct guidance as they seek to engage in those activities.

In addition to incorporating the findings of this study into principal preparation programs, these findings could also be used to design ongoing professional development activities aimed at improving communication effectiveness, building leadership skills, providing teacher support, and building trust and respect. A professional development program aimed at improving these qualities could prove fruitful in these times of increased pressure and added accountability. We must tap into the interpersonal aspects of the role of the assistant principal so that the proper capacity can be built for the benefit of our students.

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APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS LETTER

UNIVERSITYof **HOUSTON**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

August 22, 2012

Jose Davalos
c/o Dr. Angus MacNeil
Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Jose Davalos,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "The Importance of the Relationships between Teachers and Assistant Principals" was conducted on July 25, 2012.

At that time, your request for exemption under **Category 4** was approved pending modification of your proposed procedures/documents.

The changes you have made adequately respond to the identified contingencies. As long as you continue using procedures described in this project, you do not have to reapply for review. * Any modification of this approved protocol will require review and further approval. Please contact me to ascertain the appropriate mechanism.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

Kirstin Rochford, MPH, CIP, CPIA
Director, Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **July 1, 2017**. If the project is completed prior to this date, a final report should be filed to close the protocol. If the project will continue after this date, you will need to reapply for approval if you wish to avoid an interruption of your data collection.

Protocol Number: 12567-EX