

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree

Doctor of Education
in Professional Leadership

by

Scott A. Van Beck

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ABSTRACT

Our public schools are in crisis. More specifically, our schools are under-performing when compared to other developed nations, and we seem unable to close the achievement gap between Anglo and Asian student groups versus African-American and Hispanic groups. Although solutions are elusive to educators, we seem to agree on one thing: Our public schools need to improve – and quickly – or we will continue to lose ground in an increasingly competitive global economy. Leithwood et al. (2004), Marzano, Water, and McNulty (2005), Portin et al. (2009), Louis and Leithwood et al. (2010), and Knapp et al. (2010) stated that the relationships between teachers and the school principal are extremely important in high-performing schools. Likewise, low-performing schools lack strong, positive relationships between teachers and their principal. As the center of reflective practice between teachers and the principal, the school itself will be a critical key to improving our nation's future student achievement.

For this study, 310 practicing campus principals from a large Gulf Coast metropolitan area were interviewed. The survey utilized cognitive interviews and the items measured the principals' perceptions regarding the importance of good schools as well as their descriptions of the culture of good schools. This study looked at the responses of school 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 relations with their teachers? And, (4) how does the principal look out for the personal welfare of their teachers?

Data coding was utilized to determine the emergent themes from the principals' responses regarding their beliefs about the importance of developing relationships between the school principal and teachers. Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine percentages and frequencies of principals' responses. Results of the study showed that principals identified three dominant factors in positive relationships between principals and teachers that impact student achievement. Leadership and support, communication, and inter-personal (trust and respect) skills were found to be the most important factors in developing positive relationships between principals and teachers to impact student achievement. The results of this study will expand the knowledge base regarding the complex role and expectations of the principal and provide useful information that can be used to inform graduate level educational leadership courses and the preparation of school leaders, in addition to providing for better professional development and evaluation during teaching and principal careers.

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