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Ted J. Landry

May, 2012

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURE OF A GOOD SCHOOL

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

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It is understood when you enroll in a doctoral program that it will be a long and arduous process and it will take an extremely high level of perseverance to see it through to the end. Knowing this and actually achieving the desired end result are two completely different things however, and, as I complete this journey, I would be remiss if I did not take a minute to acknowledge all of those who have encouraged and supported me during this process.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the literature, leadership and culture are intertwined. Organizational and leadership theorists alike hold that a leader's perceptions and behaviors are significant, if not primary, determinants of an organization's culture and climate. Given that the assistant principal is exceeded in positional authority only by the principal at a school and the fact that assistant principals will have an impact in all visible and inner workings of the school, there is a need to examine the relationship between the assistant principal's leadership perspectives and school culture by studying the perceptions and beliefs of assistant principals. The purpose of the study is to examine the beliefs and perceptions of assistant principals regarding the factors necessary for a school to be considered a good school, and how they describe the culture and climate of good schools.

This study is an exploratory inquiry using a subset of the archived data from a much larger, multi-phase study of principals and assistant principals in the Gulf Coast Region of Southeast Texas. The participants, 371 current campus assistant principals, were surveyed by using a combination of traditional survey and cognitive interviewing techniques to address questions related to assistant principal perceptions regarding the characteristics of a good school and how they would describe the culture of a good school.

Six major themes were identified from the responses for each of the two research questions. The themes were given the following operational definitions: Student

Achievement; Professional Learning Communities; Positive Climate; Strong Leadership; Parental & Community Involvement; Student Discipline (research question one); and Valuing the Student (research question two). The results of the analysis indicated that the comprehensive nature of the roles asked of the assistant principal puts them in a position to be qualified, almost uniquely so, to render a perspective on what is good in schools and what good schools look like.

This study demonstrates, through the perceptions of assistant principals, that for a school to be considered "good," it must do so by first establishing a strong, healthy culture that is conducive to not only learning, but to the well-being of the whole individual, both adult and student.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Roland Barth states that the culture of the school is the key to the success of students and adults alike (Barth, 2001) and as school administrators struggle with the best course of action to evolve and shape their schools into institutions that reflect the best characteristics of their communities, while, at the same time, attempting to provide the best opportunities for the success of their students, one of the constant areas to address is organizational culture. The culture of a school as defined by Deal and Peterson are the deep patterns of beliefs, traditions and values that have been formed over a school's history. Couple this with their definition of the climate of the school as being the values, traditions, language, purpose, unwritten rules, assumptions, symbols and artifacts of a school (Deal & Peterson, 2002), and you have what Barth describes as "the way we do things around here." (Barth, 2002). Deal and Peterson explain culture as

> This invisible, taken for granted flow of beliefs and assumptions [which] gives meaning to what people say and do. It shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions. This deeper structure of life in organizations is reflected and transmitted through symbolic language and expressive action. Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time. (Deal & Peterson, 1990).

As a result of the significant role that culture plays in an organization, it has the ability to support or sabotage not only student success but quality professional learning (Peterson, 2002) and is the basis for school improvement (Saphier & King, 1985).

Marriot (2001) states that culture, as a powerful underlying force, shapes the attitudes, activities and interactions of the school community and its members. As a reciprocal relationship, the attitudes of the individual members of the community play an important role in the type of culture that is constructed and maintained. Taking the lead in this endeavor is the school leadership. There is significant educational research asserting the principal's impact on school culture (Blasé & Blasé, 1994; Deal & Peterson, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1993). There is, however, not as much research on the role of the assistant principal and its impact on culture. As educational leaders come to the realization that in today's schools leaders need to hire administrative and faculty leaders with complimentary skills and empower them with authority, the role of the assistant principal continues to evolve, one can see just how significant a part they play in the formation and maintenance of the school's culture (Reeves, 2006).

Panyako and Rorie (1987) characterize the student management and maintenance of order duties of the assistant principal as traditional. Modern assistant principals are no longer relegated to these tasks alone. Drake and Roe (1994) suggest that, in addition to these traditional duties, an assistant principal should keep the role of instructional leader uppermost in mind when developing their job description. Couple these roles with Myers' (1994) assertion that there is an increasing tendency for the assistant principal to be viewed by the principal as an advisor and one can see that there are very few aspects of a school that the assistant principal will not impact. As a result of this increased impact the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the assistant principal could very well play a very large role in the developing, shaping and evolution of the school culture and climate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the beliefs and perceptions of assistant principals regarding the factors necessary for a school to be considered a good school, and how they describe the culture and climate of good schools.

Statement of the Problem

While there is research examining the relationship between climate and leadership in government, industry and business, there are fewer studies that examine the connection between school climate and school leaders (Griffith, 1999). The research that has been done has focused mainly on the influence of the school principal. There are even fewer studies that have focused on the perceptions and beliefs of school leaders regarding what constitutes a good school and their descriptions of the culture of a good school. This is especially true of the role of the assistant principal, which Weller and Weller support when they state, "One of the 'least researched' and 'least discussed' roles in educational leadership is that of the assistant principal" (as cited in Harris & Lowery, 2004, p. xiii).

Goldsmith-Conley (1998) asserts that schools lack enough educators who are aware of the power and the nature of school culture, and how their daily decisions determine the culture along with its effects on the behavior and character of its participants. Given the consensus of researchers that school leaders are the leading catalyst for school culture and climate (Blasé & Blasé, 1994; Deal & Peterson, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1993), and one of the main foci for school leaders should be the formation and maintenance of the school culture (Fairman & McLean, 1988; Schein, 1992),

attempting to formulate a working definition of what constitutes “a good school” is increasingly becoming a necessity.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to the growing but still relatively small amount of literature devoted to the role of the assistant principal and their impact on schools. Given the evolving role of the assistant principal and recognizing the impact that this mid-management level position can have demonstrates a need to better understand how administrators view not only the role of the assistant principal but how their interaction within the school community can positively or negatively impact the culture and climate of a school.

As schools continue to be held accountable through state wide, high stakes testing with the principals being held directly responsible for the results, the principals are finding themselves more likely to lean on the assistant principals for the management of the school while they devote more of their time and energy to instructional leadership and the overall vision of the school. With this enhanced role in the everyday management of the school, assistant principals are being thrust into positions that heretofore have been the sole realm of the principal. These uncharted new roles for the assistant principal have given them a great deal of influence over most of what is characterized by Maslow (1954) as the bottom rungs of the hierarchy of needs. These bottom rungs focus on the security and social aspects of an individual. Sergiovanni and Carver (1980), in a critique of Maslow’s hierarchy, agreed that for most people expressions of the higher order needs will be muted if fulfilling lower-order needs is seriously deficient. With assistant principals becoming increasingly responsible for establishing the basis for what we

consider faculty morale, it has become apparent that more research is needed to better understand the overall role of the assistant principal and their contributions, either positive or negative, to the evolving culture and climate of a school.

Research Questions

Research Question One:

What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding the characteristics of a good school?

Research Question Two:

What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding how they describe the culture of a good school?

Definition of Terms

1. **Culture –** deep patterns of beliefs, traditions, and values that have been formed over a school's history (Deal & Peterson, 2002).
2. **Climate –** the values, traditions, language, purpose, unwritten rules, assumptions, symbols and artifacts of a school (Deal & Peterson, 2002).
3. **Assistant Principal –** Usually the entry level positions for those interested in school administration as a career and may be responsible for many of the same tasks as principals (Marshall, 1992).
4. **Collective Teacher Efficacy -** a shared belief in a group's capability to attain goals and accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997).

Overview of Methodology

The design of this study will use a combination of traditional survey and cognitive interviewing techniques to address questions related to good schools and the culture of good schools. Demographic information about participants' schools and backgrounds were obtained in a standard survey format. A mixed methods approach will be utilized in the study since the traditional survey portion is quantitative and the interview portion contains open-ended questions which are associated with qualitative research.

Archived data will be utilized in this study. Participants in this study included two groups of school administrators from different settings in a large metropolitan area; 310 principals and 371 assistant principals. The survey instrument includes three sections. Section one consists of twenty-two items for administrators' background information and school demographics. Section two includes 62 Likert scale items and section three consists of 31 open ended questions. This study will focus on the responses of the 371 assistant principals on two of the open ended questions.

Organization of the Study

The study will contain five chapters. Chapter one will include the introduction, purpose of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, hypotheses, definition of terms, and overview of the methodology. Chapter two will review the related literature. The review of literature will include an examination of culture and climate and its impact on organizations with particular attention paid to schools. The review will also examine the impact of leadership on the culture and climate of an organization along with an historical review of the role of the

assistant principal. The review will close with a discussion of the assistant principal and how their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes drive the changes that can occur within a school's culture and climate. Chapter three will describe the methodology that will be used in the study. The description will include information about participants, research instrument, data collection procedures, statistical procedures of treatment of data, and the limitations of the study. Chapter four will present an analysis of the data. Chapter five will present the findings, summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The purpose of the study is to examine the beliefs and perceptions of assistant principals regarding the factors necessary for a school to be considered a good school, and how they describe the culture and climate of good schools.

This chapter provides a review of the literature covering: (a) a review of the assistant principal's role in schools; (b) the concept of organizational culture in schools; (c) the impact of leadership on the formation and maintenance of culture in schools; and (d) the impact of the assistant principal on collective teacher efficacy and the formation of a positive learning environment.

The role of the Assistant Principal

Historically, assistant principals were a creation at the secondary school level as a way to handle the increasingly larger enrollments in consolidated schools (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The position grew out of need and expediency rather than clear and thoughtful planning (Mertz & McNeely, 1999).

One of the earliest references to an assistant in education comes from the Boston local board practice in the 1800s of a grammar master, who was the head of the school, and a writing master, who was second in command and in charge if the grammar master was away. In 1867, the superintendent of Boston schools was quoted as saying, "every head assistant should be capable of handling the master's work during his absence" (NAESP, 1970, p.4), and there is evidence that the San Francisco public schools agreed with this statement by adopting the Boston practice of appointing a special assistant who

has charge of the school records (pp. 4-5) thereby demonstrating that the work of the head authority in schools needed to be augmented by mid-level managers even in the early stages of American public education.

As schools progressed into the 1900s, and as their enrollment grew, so too did the appointments of assistant principals, but without any clear definition of their function or role. Harris and Lowery (2004) state that "Records are unclear as to the actual emergence of the assistant principalship; however, Glanz suggests that the role began in the 1920s" (Matthews & Crow, 2003, p. 1) as principals in charge of larger schools were assigned personnel with the title of "supervisors." There were usually two types of supervisors: one, a "special supervisor," usually female, "was relieved of some teaching responsibilities to help assist less-experienced teachers in subject matter mastery" (Glanz, 1994, p. 37). The second,

> A "general supervisor," usually male, was selected to not only deal with more general subjects such as mathematics and science, but also to assist the principal in the logistical operations of the school. The general supervisor, subsequently called assistant principal, would prepare attendance reports, collect data for evaluation purposes, and coordinate special school programs. (Glanz, 1994, p. 38).

Since that time, the role of the assistant principal has evolved based on the random nature of school needs rather than any clear data or research (Weller & Weller, 2002). There has been evidence to show the role adapting itself to situations and causing individuals in those roles to accept responsibilities beyond those listed above and to engage in tasks involving staff development and teacher supervision (Lunenberg, 2003). According to

Weller and Weller (2002), the position of assistant principal is between that of the teachers and principals, and this "between" position makes the leadership role a difficult one. It often becomes one that entails "performing any and all duties assigned by a superior" (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. 9).

Role Ambiguity

Having explored the nebulous nature of the role of the assistant principal, what exactly do they do? Since the task of discipline management is the most visible of the myriad roles that they are asked to play, too often assistant principals are seen as separate from instructional leadership in their "mock-military discipline role" (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The assistant principal holds a critical position in education organizations for several reasons however. First, it is typically the entry level position for administrative careers and as such tends to have a fairly high mobility rate as individuals use it as a stepping stone to climb the ladder into higher level positions (Armstrong, 2004). Secondly, since the nature of their tasks causes them to touch every aspect of the school, its stakeholders, and environment, the assistant principals maintain the norms and rules of the school culture. Finally, the assistant principals encounter, on a daily basis, the fundamental dilemmas of school systems (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Given this unique and wholly global look at the inner most workings of a school, the assistant principals have developed into the prime group of individuals who could generate a unique picture of the existing condition of public education.

Attempts have been made through the years to describe and evaluate the role of the assistant principal (Armstrong, 2004; Black, 2002; Glanz, 1994; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary & Donaldson, 2001). By using this research, which

typically focused on first-hand accounts by assistant principals, we can begin to identify the nature and functions of the job. Assistant principals do many of the same tasks as the principal but spend the majority of their time dealing with issues of school management, student activities and services, community relations, personnel, and curriculum and instruction (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Many assistant principals share tasks common to the job. These include conferences with parents and students, handling behavior issues with students, and student attendance issues (Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelly & McLeary, 1988). The research by Pellicer updated information that went back to the 1960s and was again updated in 2004 by Armstrong. Armstrong (2004) reported these duties in order, from most frequent to least frequent:

- Discipline
- Campus building/safety
- Student activities
- Building Maintenance
- Teacher evaluations
- Special education planning meetings
- Textbooks
- Duty schedule
- Tutorial programs
- New teacher/mentor programs
- Assessment data
- Staff development
- Supervise departments community activities
- Attendance
- Graduation
- Campus decision-making teams
- Lockers
- Master schedule
- Curriculum development
- Transportation
- Keys
- Parking

The assistant principal seldom has a consistent, well defined job description. Along with any of the above duties that are constants in his day, the assistant principal could, at any moment, be tasked with an ad hoc duty from the principal (Mertz & McNeely, 1999).

The evolution of the role of the assistant principal has been one of constant additions to an already difficult position. A review of the literature confirms that the role of the assistant principal has evolved over time. A comparison of the research findings from the 1970s to the 2000s reveal that assistant principals in the 1970s were more likely to be involved in student activities, discipline, clerical duties and teacher evaluations (Austin & Brown, 1970; Stoner & Voorhies, 1981). In comparison, the assistant principals in the 1980s were very likely to be involved in the same duties as that of the assistant principals of the 1970s with the addition of articulating the goals of the school and school climate issues (Anderson, 1987; Kelly, 1987; Smith, 1987). In the 1990s assistant principals were more likely to be involved in the same duties as that of the assistant principals of the 1970s and 1980s with the addition of planning for instruction, master schedule development and curriculum development (Cantwell, 1993). The turning of the century saw the assistant principals of the 2000s engaging in the duties of those of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, but with the advent of new federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind, the addition of a much greater role in the instructional leadership of schools (Armstrong, 2004).

Role ambiguity means that the assistant principal's roles and duties include "ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent responsibilities (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The comprehensive nature of the roles asked of them puts the assistant principal in a

position to be qualified, almost uniquely so, to render a perspective on what is good in schools and what good schools look like.

Organizational culture in schools

The Concept of Organizational Climate

The concept of organizational climate can be traced to the work of Lewin in the 1950s and his attempt to construct a theory of motivation within organizations (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). The complex theory that evolved from this early research identified situational variables that could be measured to examine the effects of climate on specific behaviors of individuals. This foundational research led to the later works of human relations theorists such as Likert and McGregor (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). In his discussion of climate, McGregor (1960) noted that the term climate was being used in varying contexts but that it consistently referred to some feature or characteristic of an environment that has consequences for the behavior of an individual or a group. Likert (1967) continued this work and advocated management that supports a climate characterized by supportive relationships, group decision-making, and high performance goals. He did not however, make any attempt to clearly define the term climate.

Other theorists of this period, such as Indik (1968), also believed that climate reflected a complex social structure in which individuals and groups exist. He argued that climate related variables influence the responses of individuals within a group, thereby moving the group in one direction or the other. He also believed that these variables could be measured and manipulated to influence the organization's climate and its members' behaviors.

Litwin and Stringer (1968) articulated a framework in which climate mediates the effects of organizational system factors on individual motivation and resultant behaviors. Their view of climate was one that describes the subjective nature or quality of the organizational environment whose properties can be perceived or experienced by members of the organization. It was at this point that the concept of organizational climate began to be defined. To Litwin and Stringer (1968) the term refers to "a set of measureable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in this environment and assumed to influence their motivation and behavior." (p. 187). They went on to identify structure and support along with encouragement and emphasis on reward rather than punishment as the dimensions or variables that most affect organizational climate positively. These variables, along with high performance standards, determine individual and group responses which becomes the basis for explaining and predicting member and group behaviors.

Tagiuri (1968) continued to more clearly define organizational climate when he cited a need to shift from an operational definition to a more formal definition. In an attempt to formalize the definition he ascribed certain empirical attributes to organizational climate. This framework included fourteen attributes, which he readily acknowledged to be arbitrary, to the definition. His definition of climate is that "Climate is the relatively enduring quality of the total environment that (a) is experienced by the occupants, (b) influences their behavior, and (c) can be described in terms of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the environment" (p. 25).

Over time the development of this working definition of organizational climate demonstrates the interactive and reciprocal relationship between the individual and the

organizational group. The variables that make up the organization's climate establish the values, traditions, language, purpose, unwritten rules, assumptions, symbols, and artifacts of an organization (Deal & Peterson, 2002). The climate, in turn, significantly impacts the nature of the organization's culture. Organizational culture is defined as the deep patterns of beliefs, traditions, and values that have been formed over an organization's history (Deal & Peterson, 2002). As a result of the truly dependent relationship of the terms culture and climate, over time the two terms have become somewhat synonymous and are used interchangeably by many researchers and practitioners. While the concepts are overlapping, there is a distinction between the two however. Climate is often viewed as behaviors, while culture is seen as encompassing the values and norms of the organization (Hoy, 1990).

School Culture

Schools have long been viewed as parallel structures with businesses and inevitably business models find their way into schools. Organizational culture and climate are no different. In the early 1960s, not long after McGregor, Likert, Litwin, and Indik began researching climate, other researchers began applying it to schools. Halpin and Croft (1963) were among some of the first to attempt a definition of school climate. They described it as the personality of the school, stating, "Personality is to the individual what climate is to the organization." (p. 1). More recently, Dietrich and Bailey (1996) introduced specific descriptors in their definition of school climate when they described it as "a comprehensive structure made up of a school's culture, physical plant, organizational structure, social relationships, and individual member behaviors" (p. 16). Building on this, Hoy and Hannum (1997) have defined school climate as:

> The organizational climate of a school is the set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one school from another and influences the behavior of its members. In more specific terms, school climate is the relatively stable property of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools. (p. 291).

Despite what appears to be a fairly concrete definition of school climate, there are those detractors who suggest that the image of school climate varies considerably depending on the context from which it is viewed. Anderson (1982) compares the field of climate research reminiscent to "the seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of an elephant based on the one part each one could touch" (p. 376). Freiberg (1987) supports Anderson's position by stating, "No single factor determines a school's climate. However, the interaction of various school climate factors can create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community to teach and learn at optimum levels" (p. 22).

Given that climate is more closely defined by behaviors, it is the condition of the culture/climate aspect that is preferred in studies as the data is less abstract and more descriptive. On the other hand, culture is more symbolic and more difficult to pinpoint (Hoy, 1990). In an effort to give culture a more tangible essence, researchers have attempted to establish very specific descriptors to which values may be assigned. According to Morgan (1997), "When we observe culture, we are observing an evolved form of social practice that has been influenced by many complex interactions between people, events, situations, actions and general circumstance" (p. 151). Barth (2002) defines culture as a set of norms, values and beliefs, symbols and metaphors, rituals and

ceremonies, language/communication, traditions and stories, and can be seen in the fabric of everyday activities. These descriptors allow for the emergence of the school's culture. This culture, whether it is positive in nature or negative, is instrumental in establishing the identity of the school.

Norms

The norms of a school organization reinforce and symbolize what the school is about (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). Saphier and King (1985) stated, "Wherever these norms exist, they reside in teachers' and administrators' beliefs and show up in their actions" (p. 68). The challenge for the school leadership is to strengthen school culture by reinforcing the school's norms and to establish new ones that better serve the school's mission (King & Blumer, 2000).

Although schools differ in demographics, location, and communities there are similar norms in every school. Saphier and King (1985) identified twelve norms of school culture as: (a) collegiality; (b) experimentation; (c) high expectations; (d) trust and confidence; (e) tangible support; (f) reaching out to the knowledge bases; (g) appreciation and recognition; (h) caring, celebration, and humor; (i) involvement in decision-making; (j) protection of what is important; (k) traditions; and (l) honest, open communication.

Schools reinforce these norms through a reward and punishment system. "Reward systems are comprehensive, consistent, and focus on those aspects of the organization that are tied to success and values of the school" (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000, p. 65). Members of the organization who follow the norms are rewarded while those who do not are punished. The decisions that members make in this respect will

significantly impact not only their standing and status within the organization but will also establish where they fit in the overall structure of the social entity of the school (Morgan, 1997). Abrupt disruption of these norms could be catastrophic for the organization and administrators should be cautious as they consider change (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Values and Beliefs

Values are those things that are considered deeply held views that members of the organization find worthwhile (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). These views form one of the major aspects of a school's culture, and over time the beliefs and values of the organization's members illuminate the culture of the school (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Marriot, 2001). What members of an organization value are so impactful that they have the ability to shape how people think, feel, and act in a school (Deal & Peterson, 2002). Likewise, belief statements become living documents within the culture of the school which become an integral component of the decision making process. During the decision making process and after the problem has been identified, members of a school or organization are able to determine where a problem fits within the organization's system of beliefs and are then able to find solutions that are consistent with the culture's agreed upon beliefs (Patterson, 2000).

Ultimately, values and beliefs translate into what we say and what we do. Values, both espoused and values in action, are large components of organizational culture. Senge et al. (1994) explained:

> There is a distinction between our espoused values – which we profess to believe in – and our values in action which actually guide our behavior. These latter

> values are encoded into our brains at such a fundamental level that we can't easily see them. We rarely bring them to the surface or question them. (p 209)

Peterson (2002) indicated that the organizational culture of a school possesses a widely shared sense of purpose and values. Values, along with visions and sense of purpose that bring an organization together, can help each member of the organization understand and absorb the mission and challenge of the entire organization (Morgan, 1997). Saphier and King (1985) noted that core values are reflected in community building, problem solving skills, and effective communication. These ideas have been explored most recently with the development of the Professional Learning Community concept espoused by authors such as Peter Senge and Richard Dufour (Dufour, Eaker & Dufour, 2005; Senge et al., 1994).

Educational leaders of a school set the tone for the school in terms of how the core values of the school are communicated to its members. Traditionally, education organizations value "getting along" in well defined chains of command and believe that their leaders have the answers they need in order to effectively do what is asked of them (Wagner, 2006). Within the school's organization, the leaders must define, display, and reinforce the shared values that define the organization (Sashkin & Walberg, 1993). According to Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, and Sobel (2000), effective administrators need to exemplify the values that they want to instill in the school's organization. Behavior that is consistent with core values of the organization establishes trust among staff members and influences the culture of the school. (King & Blumer, 2000).

The core values of the organization can have a positive or negative effect on the overall culture of the organization. In schools where professional development is not

valued and teachers do not believe that they can learn anything new, those teachers who want to share new ideas will be ridiculed (Peterson, 2002). This is supported through the work of Bandura and his concept of Collective Teacher Efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Collective teacher efficacy, as described by Bandura, is a shared belief in a group's capability to attain goals and accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997). The essential difference between collective teacher efficacy and perceived teacher efficacy concerns the unit of agency – that is, whether goals and tasks are attained by individuals or by groups (Hardin, 2010). There is evidence to support the belief that an institution which has a strong collective teacher efficacy fosters a healthy learning climate for students (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Bandura suggests that teachers operate within a collective social system rather than in isolation; thereby, development for both the individual and the institution is impacted through this reciprocal relationship (Bandura, 1997). Given the nature of this relationship, it is again evident how teacher efficacy, both for the individual and at the collective level, can impact the nature of success demonstrated by an institution.

Symbols and Metaphors

Morgan (1993) states that, "Ideas about organizations are always based in implicit images or metaphors that persuade us to see, understand, and manage situations in a particular way" (p. xxi). The strength of the metaphor is that it makes members of the organization see how they affect the organizational culture (Morgan, 1997). Administrators use metaphors to conceptualize their jobs, which enable them to organize their work (Marshall, 1992).

As with any descriptor, symbols and metaphors are not universally sound predictors of the overall culture of a school. According to Hartzell (2002), metaphors only draw attention to certain characteristics of the things, people, processes, or events they describe. Educational leaders would do well to acknowledge the fact that metaphors, while somewhat indicative, have their limitations (Hartzell, 2002).

Rituals and Ceremonies

Rituals and ceremonies, the routines of the school, symbolize what is important and valued by the members of the school organization. Organizations promote rituals, the everyday activities and ceremonies, which provide closure during transitions and recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of members of the organization (Peterson, 2002). It is through these activities and ceremonies that organizations are able to keep their culture alive (Robbins, 1997).

Deal and Peterson (2002) stated that every school has hundreds of routines and each routine is significant. "When these routine events can be connected to a school's mission and values, they summon spirit and reinforce cultural ties" (Deal & Petereson, 2002, p. 32). These routines are visible daily and are often entrenched in the formal structure of the school (Morgan, 1997). These ceremonies often have special meanings and reflect the school's history. "Strong cultures hold a variety of ceremonies to mark special occasions, continue meaningful traditions to reinforce values, and perpetuate rituals that provide connection" (Deal & Peterson, 2002, p. 41).

Administrators play a significant part in supporting the rituals and ceremonies of the school. Administrators, particularly those new to a school, need to be sensitive to the school's rituals and ceremonies (Muller-Kimball, 2004). According to Reinhartz and

Beach (2004), it is extremely important for administrators new to a school to watch and listen to all members of the school community regarding the school's traditions, rituals, and other nuances concerning the way the school functions.

> Although they may not make sense or be valued by new people coming in, their decisions are important to the people already there. Traditions and rituals may seem entirely trivial to new people or outsiders, but are symbolic of time-honored traditions within the school organization and are a central part of the campus culture. (p. 28)

An administrator can, in a very specific way, shape the culture of a school by honoring those who have worked and served the students and the school. In an effort to support the school's heart and soul, administrators should observe the rituals and traditions and celebrate the accomplishments of the staff, the students, and the community (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

Language

Without communication an organization is doomed to failure, and how individuals communicate with each other is tantamount to the nature of the culture. According to Senge et al. (1994), "Language is a medium through which we create new understandings, and new realities, as we begin to talk about them. In fact, we don't talk about what we see, we see only what we can talk about" (p. 287). Words and ideas are the means through which organizations make their reality (Morgan, 1997), and educational leaders must have strong communication skills in order for the organization to move forward.

Too many times talking is all that is discussed in terms of communication, but listening is just as, if not more, important. Weller and Weller (2002) reported that in addition to sharing information administrators must realize that listening skills are also essential to effective leadership.

> Poor listening costs an organization time, effort, and resources. Poor listeners often have to rework, spend time seeking clarification or redirection, and waste resources doing so. They are often the object of jokes and can be omitted from important assignments that could enhance their careers. They are often characterized by being forgetful or inefficient (p. 115).

Leaders who do not take the time to familiarize themselves with the organization's language will find it difficult to communicate within the organization, which could keep them from being accepted as the leader. As an element of school culture, the members of the school organization must use language that is appropriate and acceptable to the culture, endorsed and supported by the culture, and those who do not know the language are excluded. The school's language is sifted through the culture of the organization and is used to ensure adherence to the cultural norms (Weller & Weller, 2002).

Stories

Dufour and Burnette (2002) contend that a school's culture can be found in the stories that the organization tells about itself. Stories typically contain a narrative of events about the organization's founders, rule breaking, rags-to-riches successes, and reductions in the work force (Robbins, 1997). Paying attention to the stories allows a leader to use the telling and retelling of the stories of the school to their advantage.

Stories related about the administrators of the school enable its members to know what is expected of them (Deal & Peterson, 2002). Leaders, especially those new to a school or organization, could learn the history of the school by talking to the school's storytellers, staff who love retelling the stories about the history of the school (Peterson, 2002).

This communicative interaction not only gives the leader a gold mine of information about the organization but also goes a long way in building relationships with the individuals in the school. Deal and Peterson (2002) state, "By repeating stories, leaders reinforce values and beliefs and so shape the culture of the school. Sagas – stories of unique accomplishment, rooted in the history and held in sentiment – can convey core values to all of a school's constituents" (p. 96). Noe (2002) further noted that by "harnessing the power of stories, educational leaders can maintain or create a positive school culture because stories celebrate what has been done, what not to do, and what can be done" (p. 21).

Leadership impact on "Good School" Culture

Leader impact on Culture

From a systems perspective, the concepts of culture and climate and leadership appear to be implicitly intertwined. Researchers have argued repeatedly that a leader's assumptions, perceptions, beliefs and the processes that result from those beliefs are the primary determinants of the culture and climate of an organization and, in turn, a basis for the social and motivational processes affecting individual behavior (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). These ideas are in agreement with early researchers such as McGregor (1960) and Likert (1967) who wrote:

> The day-by-day behavior of the immediate superior and of other significant people in the managerial organization communicates something about their assumptions concerning management which is of fundamental significance. Many subtle behavioral manifestations of managerial attitude create what is often referred to as the psychological climate of the relationship (McGregor, 1960, p. 133-134).

and:

> The leadership and other processes of the organization must be such as to ensure a maximum probability that all interactions and in all relationships within the organization, each member, in light of his background, values, desires, and expectations, will view the experience as supportive and one which builds and maintains his sense of personal worth and importance (Likert, 1967, p. 47).

It is obvious that both of these researchers viewed the leadership process as a key variable in the formation of trust, communication, recognition, and overall relationship building process between superiors and subordinates, which in turn has a direct impact on the formation and maintenance of culture and climate perceptions.

In a study conducted by Litwin and Stringer (1968), the researchers replicated the effects of leader behavioral styles on climate by creating three simulated organizations, each with a leader exhibiting a different leadership style. The study was designed to test the hypothesis that leadership style influences organizational climate and, in turn, the motivation and behavior of organizational members. The two week experiment varied leadership style with the expected outcome that each distinct style would induce a different organizational climate. The conclusions of the study were that the most

important and dramatic determinant of climate seemed to be the leadership style used by managers or by informal leaders. They maintained that the emphasis which a leader puts on adherence to rules, the kinds of goals and standards set, and, most important, the nature of his informal relationships and communications with organization members all have great impact on organizational climate.

Following these early studies of organizational climate, researchers such as Kozlowski and Doherty in the 1980s and Schein in the early 1990s continued the work in this area. Schein (1992) expressed even stronger views regarding the effects of leadership on culture and climate. He maintained that "dynamic processes of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realize that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin," adding, "I believe that cultures begin with leaders who impose their own values and assumptions on a group" (p. 1). He argued that if the group is successful and assumptions come to be taken for granted, the culture begins to define what types of leadership are acceptable. In other words, the culture starts to define the leader. He maintained, however, that if the group's survival is threatened because elements of its culture have become maladapted, it is ultimately the function of leadership to recognize this situation and take action to correct it. He felt that within this context, leadership and culture are conceptually intertwined. He used this framework to conclude, "If one wishes to distinguish leadership from management or administration, one can argue that leaders create and change cultures, while managers and administrators live within them" (p.2).

Leadership and School Culture

Hoy and Feldman (1987) attempted to evaluate the influence that culture and climate of schools has on school effectiveness within the conceptual framework of school health. In their study, they identified seven dimensions of school health: institutional integrity, principal influence, consideration, initiating structure, source support, morale, and academic emphasis. Within this framework, the influence that a principal has on school climate variables was examined directly and indirectly in the following ways: (a) the degree of influence the principal has in maintaining an environment that protects the educational integrity of the school's program, (b) the effect that principal behavior has on the welfare of teachers, (c) the role of the principal in maintaining high teacher morale, and (d) the degree of principal involvement in establishing high academic goals. As a result of their study, Hoy and Feldman (1987) concluded that the leadership of a school is a key element of the culture and climate in that it strongly influences teacher welfare, program integrity, teacher morale, and academic expectations.

It has been argued that school leadership does not directly effect student achievement, but rather indirectly effects learning by impacting the climate of the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Current research supports this relationship by describing leadership as having an indirect influence through the way it influences the school culture (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) defined effective leadership as the ability to understand, measure, and shape the culture of the school. School leaders, especially administrators, who are involved in promoting and sustaining a healthy school culture which fosters learning, effectively enhance student achievement. As educators move away from the days of working in isolation and into an era of

collegiality and collaboration as is described by concepts such as professional learning communities, the importance of the interaction of the campus leaders with the faculty and students of a campus will significantly impact the success of the campus (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Tarter and Hoy (1988) concluded that "the effective principals are not only intellectual leaders in their schools, but are also colleagues who serve and support. They build confidence and trust" (p. 23).

A study conducted in 2005 suggested that school leaders influence student achievement in two ways. First, school leaders influence student achievement by influencing stakeholders within the school. Second, their impact is realized through their influence on school processes (Davis, Darling-Hammond, Lapointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Influencing stakeholders can be seen as developing staff, providing support and encouragement, and modeling best practices while providing solid, research-based professional development. Influencing school processes encompasses a constant assessment of both the physical plant and the organizational structures that support learning throughout the school.

In addition, identified behaviors and responsibilities of school leaders that were related to student achievement include providing: safe and orderly schools, high expectations, visibility, focus, supportive culture, communication and positive relationships, accessibility, parent outreach, shared leadership and decision making, affirmation, collaboration, intellectual stimulation, instructional leadership, monitoring and feedback, professional development, and role modeling (Cotton, 2003; Marzanno, Waters, and McNulty, 2005). Placed into this context, the importance of the mid-level

management personnel, the assistant principal, cannot be underestimated or ignored as they will play a significant role in many, if not all, of these behaviors and responsibilities.

Good Schools

Politicians, businessmen, administrators, teachers, parents, and students all have a stake in the development of high quality schools that provide access to knowledge and skills for all students. "School embodies the dreams we have for our children. All of them. These dreams must remain public property" (Meier, 1993, p. 11).

> "In general, politicians claim that they are concerned that students be adequately educated to compete in the global economy and to become productive citizens in a democratic society. Businessmen say they want those entering the work force to possess the necessary skills and attitudes to be productive workers. Teachers want their students to be successful life-long learners, able to gather and synthesize information, think critically, and adjust to the rapidly changing future-world they will inherit. Parents are concerned that their children become well-adjusted, self-sufficient, happy and productive human beings" (Guitard, 2007).

With so many varied groups setting their own criteria for what schools produce, it is difficult to come to terms with the concept of good schools and the characteristics on which they are built.

Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006) published a study that suggested the importance of three characteristics of high achieving schools: academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust. These characteristics are intertwined to form what they called academic optimism. The study suggested that academic optimism shaped the norms and behavioral expectations of the major stakeholders in the school and affected school achievement.

Meier (2002) identified the major features of good schools. They were small in size, allowing for interpersonal relationships to flourish; were self-governing and accepting of accountability, because they were in charge of their own decision making; and were places of choice for parents, students and teachers. Principal leadership has also been cited as a major predictor of student achievement (MacKey, Pitcher, & Decman, 2006). Their study found that three characteristics of the school principal most influenced student achievement. They were the vision of the principal, the educational background of the principal, and the principal's role as an instructional leader. This study supported Edmonds (1979) who cited strong principal leadership as a characteristic that promoted achievement. In addition, he cited high expectations, emphasis on basic skills, and an orderly school environment as school traits that promoted achievement.

Sergiovanni (1984) began to explore the idea of good schools when he advocated for not just competent schools, but for excellent schools. He wrote that we should expect more from our schools than just minimum standards. According to Sergiovanni (1984), excellent schools developed not only a love of learning for students but promoted critical thinking and problem solving skills as well. Sergiovanni (2001) took this exploration much further, however, when he wrote that the terms 'good' and 'effective' are often used synonymously, but that 'effectiveness' dealt with reaching a targeted outcome. He asserted that if a school established and achieved a particular goal, it would be considered to be effective but not necessarily good. He argued, based on this supposition, that an effective school is one in which the minimum passing standards were met or exceeded by student groups as measured by achievement tests. Sergiovanni's arguments supported the work of Glickman (1987), which suggested that effective schools were often assumed to

be good schools, but this was not necessarily the case. He argued that if educators did not differentiate between "goodness" and "effectiveness," they were positioning themselves to miss answering two essential questions. The first addressed the notion of "What is good?" Once that had been done, they can then move to the second question, "How do we become effective?" Glickman (1987) argued, "Effective schools can be good schools, and good schools must be effective schools – but the two are not necessarily the same" (p. 624).

The discussion of good versus effective has gone on for some time (Glickman, 1987; Sergiovanni, 2001; Cowley, 2004), and the key to the discussion lies with the definitions of the terms "good" and "effective" and which one better describes a successful school. The terms are often used synonymously; however, according to Sergiovanni (2001), effectiveness deals with the reaching of a targeted outcome, usually determined by the use of a standards-based assessment. Good schools, on the other hand, encompass much more than standardized assessments, and not only empower students to perform well, but teaching and learning occur at high cognitive levels and the social and emotional needs of all stakeholders are met (Sergiovanni, 2001; Hudson, 2009). Sergiovanni (2001) stated,

> The problem of determining goodness and differentiating it from effectiveness was compounded by the fact that schools often look 'effective,' but may not be 'good.' Many schools rated in the top group according to standards-based assessments are not rated as such because they provide superior teaching, have better faculties, or improved educational programs, instead, they are rated highly

> simply because the values of the home are more closely aligned with the values of the school" (p. 193).

Examining good schools, Hudson (2009) described a good school as one that,

> "is collaborative; is pupil centered, has a commitment to a variety of teaching and learning styles with as much student involvement in their own learning process as possible; has explicit high expectations; has shared values and goals; provides an effective learning environment; emphasizes the value of positive reinforcement; is itself, always learning; affords students rights and responsibilities where all involved are left in no doubt that disrupting the education of other students is totally unacceptable; has good and mutually beneficial links with the business community; has strong and valued home-school links" (pgs. 24-25).

Quite a bit of what is written on good schools reference stable environments and collaborative attitudes by adults (Hudson, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2001; Meier, 2002; Hoy, Tarter & Hoy, 2006). Many of the authors also refer to leadership as being one of the primary factors that will have an impact on this stable environment which then drives student achievement and success (Cotton, 2003; Marzanno, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Coupled together, this evidence renders a picture illustrating the role of the campus leadership, their beliefs and perceptions, along with their actions, in the formation and maintenance of the culture and climate of a school. While there are some very sound programs in existence and practice today, such as Professional Learning Communities, one of the main factors of success is the leadership of the campus (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Collective Teacher Efficacy

While the role of teaching largely is one of working in isolation, Donald Schon contends that the most effective professionals reflect about their experiences and apply knowledge to practice, while interacting with other seasoned professionals in the same field (Schon, 1983). As assistant principals search for their place in the school as an organization and determine the type of impact that they will have on the culture of the school, they must also find ways to assist in the professional development of the faculty and move their teachers forward as professionals they must continue to view these faculties as not only individuals, with independent and personal goals and motivations, but also to view the faculty as an entity in and of itself. These collective entities can and will exert a great deal of control on whether or not students are learning successfully in an institution. The success of learning plays a large role in the overall culture and climate of a school.

To discuss the factors, including the impact of the assistant principal, which influence the formation of a positive culture as opposed to a toxic one, a general understanding of institutional psychology is needed. Much has been written in the recent years about organizations, also termed Professional Learning Communities, and their impact on student learning and their design. These designs are touted to produce vibrant professional cultures that positively influence student learning (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour 2005). Since much of what makes up a Professional Learning Community is grounded in institutional psychology and the influence of environmental conditions on the collective and individual consciousness (Feger & Arruda, 2008), the link to Social Cognitive Theory and collective teacher efficacy is evident. Social Cognitive Theory, proposed by

Albert Bandura (1986), saw its genesis in Social Learning Theory, which is a set of assumptions about human learning (Bandura, 1977). The critical difference between Social Cognitive Theory and Social Learning Theory is Bandura's emphasis of the construct of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura as "the belief of one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (1977, p.2). This view of human behavior emphasizes the beliefs individuals hold about themselves. This includes the view that self-perception of capability is a mediating construct in a person's behavior, largely determining what he or she does with the experience, skills, and knowledge that he or she has (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Research has shown that teachers who possess high levels of self-efficacy exert a positive influence on student learning (Woolfolk, 2004), which in turn impacts the overall culture of the school. School administrators then face the challenge of cultivating this self-efficacy of the individual teachers because of its impact on student learning and school culture.

Bandura believes that the construct of self-efficacy can be extrapolated to groups (1997). He explains that collective teacher efficacy refers to a faculty's shared belief in its capability to accomplish certain tasks and achieve particular goals (Bandura, 1997). Bandura writes, "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling. By observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (1977, p32). This social dimension of human learning is a critical element of Social Cognitive Theory and challenges the behaviorist assumptions about imitation and reinforcement, emphasizing instead the cognitive processes behind self-belief (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

By design, Professional Learning Communities are constructed with the intent of providing not only resources, but support for teachers to develop professionally. Teachers become the instrument of change within the faculty and take on the proclaimed role of life-long learners. This process leans heavily on the understanding that teachers must leave the isolation of their private classrooms and move out into a shared world of professional colleagues where learning from each other may occur. This learning includes a great deal of peer observation and modeling, which is open to constructive critique and is meant to help the individual teacher improve while creating a work place that is ripe with opportunities for growth. The ultimate goal of this shared learning and improved individual craft performance is a collective growth that will impact the entire institution, creating a community of learners who engage in learning for its own sake (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005). Professional Learning Communities are by and large concerned with institutional psychology and the influence of environmental conditions on collective and individual consciousness (Feger & Arruda, 2008), thereby demonstrating the link between Professional Learning Communities and Social Cognitive Theory.

Social Cognitive Theory

The idea of a collective teacher efficacy is embedded in Social Cognitive Theory which is rooted in the desire to understand the internal processes of human beings as it relates to educational theories. As these theories and writings progressed through William James, Carl Jung, and Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century to John Dewey and into the early 1920s, a behaviorist paradigm in psychology began to take hold which diverted the focus from the internal processes to the observable stimuli (Parajes, 2002, as cited in Hardin, 2010). In the early 1940s, Neal Miller and John Dollard

proposed a Social Learning Theory that became the foundation of Social Cognitive Theory. The central assumptions of Social Learning Theory concerned outcome expectancies, overt behavioral reinforcement, and observation (Parajes, 2002, as cited in Hardin, 2010). The 1950s saw the beginning of Social Learning being applied to education. In 1954, Julian Rotter wrote *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology* which emphasized the importance of environment on human learning (Hardin, 2010). Erickson, Maslow, and Lewin, among others, furthered this idea and called for a renewed focus on the internal cognitive processes of human beings (Woolfolk, 2009). The work of Maslow, in particular, became a catalyst in interest in the affective and internal motivating forces which led to an infatuation with self-esteem (Parajas, 2002, as cited in Hardin, 2010). The excesses of this self-esteem movement led to a renewed focus on academic achievement and motivation during the 1980s. It was at this time that Albert Bandura wrote *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (1986) which formally introduced Social Cognitive Theory and emphasized the importance of self-efficacy as a cognitive construct.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is a construct within Social Cognitive Theory and concerns thoughts, motivation, and action. As a psychological construct, self-efficacy has been applied broadly in many different contexts (Hardin, 2010). This widespread applicability has created some confusion and ambiguity regarding its meaning. There are three seminal publications by Bandura concerning self-efficacy: *Social Learning Theory* (1977), *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (1986), and *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (1997). These publications trace Bandura's

influence on the specific construct of self-efficacy. In each of the publications, Bandura made slight changes to the definition of self-efficacy, but his belief that the individual was the main agent of change remains constant. His supposition is that the perceived self-efficacy refers to the belief that the individual has in regards to their own capabilities and the understanding of how, in their perception, those capabilities will influence the outcome of future events (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

Bandura argued that self-efficacy beliefs work jointly with other determinants within Social Cognitive Theory to govern the thought, action, and motives of human beings (1977). He also argued that self-efficacy beliefs are not disconnected and independent; rather, these beliefs are highly structured and integrated with other social learning constructs, the result of experience and reflective thought (1997). The assumption that Bandura makes is that individuals aspire to control the events that affect their lives and that self-efficacy beliefs involve self-confidence and the individuals acting as their own agent (Hardin, 2010). According to Bandura, this quest for self-control, what individuals believe to be true about their capabilities, influences their actions and motivation more profoundly than what is objectively true (1997).

Self-efficacy differs from self-esteem in that "self-efficacy is a judgment of capability to perform a task or engage in an activity, whereas self-esteem is a personal evaluation of one's self that includes the feelings of self-worth that accompany that evaluation. Self-efficacy is a judgment of one's own confidence, self-esteem is a judgment of self-value" (Pajares, 2000, as cited in Hardin, 2010). Bandura explains, "perceived self-efficacy is concerned not with the number of skills that you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances"

(1997, p. 37). Bandura took care to distinguish between self-efficacy and confidence as well when he stated:

> Confidence is a nondescript term that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about. I can be supremely confident that I will not fail at an endeavor. Perceived self-efficacy refers to belief in one's agentive capabilities, that one can produce given levels of attainment. A self-efficacy assessment, therefore, includes both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief. Confidence is a catchword rather than a construct embedded in a theoretical system. Advances in a field
> are best achieved by constructs that fully reflect the phenomena of interest and are rooted in a theory that specifies their determinants, mediating processes, and multiple effects. Theory-based constructs pay dividends in understanding and operational guidance. The terms used to characterize personal agency, therefore, represent more than merely lexical preferences (1997, p. 382).

To clarify his point concerning individuals with high levels of self-efficacy, Bandura states:

> People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. Such an efficacious outlook fosters intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them. They heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure. They quickly recover their sense of efficacy after failures or setbacks. They attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills, which are acquirable. They approach

> threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them (1994, p. 71).

In contrast, Bandura contends that individuals with low senses of self-efficacy "shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats" (1994, p.72). He describes people with low levels of self-efficacy as follows:

> They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrate on how to perform successfully. They slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. They are slow to recover their sense of efficacy following failure or setbacks. Because they view insufficient performance as deficient aptitude it does not require much failure for them to lose faith in their capabilities (1994, p. 72).

Judgments are not the problem with such individuals; rather, it is confidence in an individual's specific agentive capabilities that marks highly efficacious behavior (Goddard, Hoy, & Woodfolk Hoy, 2004). Accordingly, it was important to Bandura to distinguish between efficacy expectancy and outcome expectancy. Bandura believed that while an individual might understand the behaviors necessary to produce a given outcome (outcome expectancy), he or she did not necessarily possess the agentive capability to execute the specific actions themselves (efficacy expectancy) (Hardin, 2010). Bandura believed the self-efficacy beliefs "affect life choices, level of motivation, quality of functioning, resilience to adversity and vulnerability to stress and depression" (1994, p. 80). He goes on to argue that perceived self-efficacy beliefs are a major source

of action in human beings which infuses in them determination, perseverance, and resilience which is demonstrated by people who sustain a fervent confidence in their own capabilities typically being able to succeed. Bandura writes, “Ordinary realities are strewn with impediments, adversities, setbacks, frustrations and inequities. People must, therefore, have a robust sense of efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed” (1994, p. 80). The point Bandura was alluding to is that genuine, reliable confidence arises from a strong sense of self-efficacy. Confidence of this nature permeates not only our levels of commitment, but our work habits as well. Therefore, the self-efficacy beliefs one holds are more predictive of success than what may be objectively true (Hardin, 2010). This concept is supported by Bandura when he writes, “It is not uncommon for perceived self-efficacy to predict future behavior better than past performance” (1986, p. 424).

According to Bandura, self-efficacy beliefs are rooted in four sources: (a) mastery experiences; (b) vicarious experiences; (c) social persuasion; and (d) somatic and emotional states (1997). Bandura believes that individuals interprets information from these sources and develops their self-efficacy beliefs as a result (Hardin, 2010). Bandura’s supposition is that mastery experiences are the most authentic of the four sources. Of this source, Bandura writes, “A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort” and continues, “After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks” (1997, p. 73). Vicarious experiences involve modeling influences. Bandura argues that individuals seek out models or mentors who possess the characteristics and qualities to which they aspire (1997). Of the

third source, social persuasion, Bandura suggests that individuals are extremely susceptible to verbal persuasion, and when told that they possess the ability to complete a task, they are more inclined to work exceptionally hard to succeed (1997). Bandura, at this point, does add a caution to this third source. He warns that, "Unrealistic boosts in efficacy are quickly disconfirmed by disappointing results of one's efforts" (1997, p. 74). The fourth source of self-efficacy concerns a person's emotional and physical needs. Individuals who are suffering from a negative emotional state or from a debilitating physical condition will see correspondingly low levels of self-efficacy (1997).

In addition to the four sources that yield self-efficacy, Bandura identifies four psychological processes through which these beliefs influence human functioning: (a) cognitive processes; (b) motivational processes; (c) affective processes; and (d) selection processes. The first process, the cognitive process, alludes to the individual's penchant to organize a plan on how to navigate through a scenario in thought prior to the event itself. Bandura states that beliefs strongly influence the type of scenarios in which individuals are willing to engage. He goes on to state that individuals who are beset with self doubt about their efficacy have a tendency to lower their aspirations and the quality of their performance deteriorates (1997). In contrast, however, those who maintain a high sense of efficacy continuously challenge themselves and use good analytic thinking which results in performance accomplishments (1997).

The second process, motivation, plays a large role in the link between collective teacher efficacy and a healthy organization. Bandura argues that individuals guide their actions through motivation and an exercise of forethought (1997). He identifies three cognitive theories associated with motivation: attribution theory, expectancy-value

theory, and goal theory. In attribution theory, motivation is explained by self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura writes, “People who regard themselves as highly efficacious attribute their failures to insufficient effort, those who regard themselves as inefficacious attribute their failures to low ability” (1997, p. 75). On expectancy values, Bandura suggests that individuals act on their beliefs based on what they feel that they can do and on the perceived outcomes (1997). Finally, regarding goal theory, Bandura states that by establishing challenging goals individuals enhance and sustain motivation (1997). He writes, “Those who have a strong belief in their capabilities exert greater effort when they fail to master the challenge” (1997, p. 76).

The affective process, Bandura’s third process, is important because it is related to a person’s coping capabilities and their capacity to control stress (Hardin, 2010). Bandura believes that those who believe that they cannot cope with stress typically are unable to handle a stressful situation (1997). His belief is that those who take an optimistic view of their personal capabilities have a greater chance of influencing the outcome of the events that affect their lives. (1997).

The fourth process is the selection process. Bandura believes that individuals are largely the products of their environments and that “belief in personal efficacy shapes the course lives take by influencing the types of activities and environments people choose” (1997, p. 75). To support this supposition, he writes, “People avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities. But they readily undertake challenging activities and select situations they judge themselves capable of handling” (1997, p. 75).

Perceived Teacher Efficacy

Bandura describes perceived teacher efficacy as a concept that extends naturally from self-efficacy theory. He posits that the creation of the learning environment that is conducive to development of cognitive competencies rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of the teacher in the classroom (1997). Other definitions of perceived teacher efficacy include the idea that it is the teacher's belief or conviction that they can influence student learning that creates an environment conducive to learning even in situations where students may be difficult or unmotivated (Ashton, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994).

General teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy are two concepts that are useful in understanding teacher's perceived teacher efficacy. The first, general teaching efficacy, refers to an individuals concept of a teacher's abilities to influence student achievement and to independently manage certain types of problems. In contrast, personal teaching efficacy refers to an individual teacher's concept of his own abilities to manage a particular situation (Ashton & Webb, 1986). While subtle, the distinction is an important one. General teaching efficacy concerns a teacher's assumptions about skilled members of his profession and is therefore an external construct (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Personal teaching efficacy is the opposite and is clearly an internal construct that is firmly embedded in the individual teacher's self-efficacy beliefs. Bandura states, "Teachers' beliefs in their efficacy affect their general orientation toward the educational process as well as their specific instructional activities (1997, p. 241).

The social dimensions and cultural environment of a school can play a significant role in determining a teacher's perceived teaching efficacy. There is data to support the

supposition that teachers feel more efficacious when they are teaching courses or classes that they feel qualified to teach and when they have perceived control of certain circumstances, such as discipline, textbook selection, and curriculum development (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). The reciprocal is true as well. The social organization of a school is positively related to high levels of perceived teacher efficacy and plays an important role to both the school as an organization and to individual teacher efficacy (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991).

Collective Teacher Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy, as described by Bandura, is a shared belief in a group's capability to attain goals and accomplish tasks (Bandura, 1997). The essential difference between collective teacher efficacy and perceived teacher efficacy concerns the unit of agency – that is, whether goals and tasks are attained by individuals or by groups (Hardin, 2010). There is evidence to support the belief that an institution, which has a strong collective teacher efficacy, fosters a healthy learning climate for students (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Bandura suggests that teachers operate within a collective social system rather than in isolation; therefore, development for both the individual and the institution is impacted through this reciprocal relationship (Bandura, 1997). Given the nature of this relationship, it is again evident how teacher efficacy, both for the individual and at the collective level, can impact the nature of success demonstrated by an institution and its culture.

According to Bandura, schools which have high collective efficacy create atmospheres that empower and vitalize. Schools in which staff members collectively

judge themselves capable of achieving academic success are likely to foster a positive atmosphere both social and academic development (Bandura, 1997). He further clarifies:

> The belief systems of the staff also create an organizational culture that can have vitalizing or demoralizing effects on the perceived efficacy of its members. Teachers who view intelligence as an acquirable attribute and believe they can attain academic successes despite students' disadvantaged backgrounds promote a collective sense of efficacy, whereas teachers who believe that intelligence is an inherent aptitude and there is little they can do to overcome the negative influence of adverse social conditions are likely to undermine one another's sense of efficacy. (1997, p. 248)

In other words, although academic achievement is a reflection of the shared contributions of individual teachers, interdependencies within faculties contribute to collective teacher efficacy (Hardin, 2010). This relationship is cyclical, however, and there are a number of factors in the school environment that can alter a teacher's beliefs in their own efficacy which will impact the collective efficacy of the group.

Perceived teacher efficacy is a contributing factor to collective efficacy, but, according to Bandura, collective teacher efficacy is not an aggregate of the self-efficacy beliefs of individual teachers on a faculty (1997). What researchers have found is that collective teacher efficacy is influenced by other contributing factors, such as teacher factors (ethnicity, gender, and experience), student factors (ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and prior academic achievement), and school factors (experience, tenure, diversity of teachers, school structure, and school level) (Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Adams & Forsyth, 2006).

As stated earlier, collective teacher efficacy is not a stand alone characteristic. It is, rather, a reciprocal relationship. Teachers exist as both producers and products of a larger collective. When a faculty develops a collectively strong sense of efficacy, they believe that they can promote and create a success environment making achievement of this goal much more plausible (Bandura, 1997). Unhealthy faculties, faced with significant challenges with socioeconomic issues and poor academic achievement, find themselves in a vicious circle of decent. As the student's success plummets, so to does the collective efficacy of the faculty, and a faculty that does not believe that it can be successful finds it much more difficult to promote the positive environment necessary for success to grow.

Collective teacher efficacy is also greatly impacted by school leadership. Bandura states that the quality of the leadership is often a contributing factor to the creation and evolution of organizational climate (Bandura, 1997). Studies suggest that in schools where principals and assistant principals created a school environment that supported teachers, while at the same time sustaining academic rigor, showed an increase in collective teacher efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Schools with a positive collective teacher efficacy also showed a much greater chance of producing student teachers with a more positive perceived efficacy (Knoblock & Whittington, 2002). Together these positive influences on a faculty create a culture that is much more conducive to the presentation, adoption, and implementation of systemic changes.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities can trace its origin back to the 1960s and 1970s with the writings of Lewin, Likert, Argyris, Schon and Drucker to name a few.

The 1980s, however, seems to mark the modern formation of professional learning communities. Studies in the 1980s began to confirm that successful schools and organizations demonstrated commonalities such as being team-oriented and having a collaborative culture. There also appeared to be patterned norms of interaction among staff (Little, 1982). Little also found that teachers in successful schools valued and participated in norms of collegiality and continuous improvement (1982).

In 1990 Peter Senge wrote *The Fifth Discipline*, which many consider to be the formal origin of professional learning communities as a concept (Hardin, 2010). Senge stated that learning organizations were "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (1990, p. 3). Senge identified five learning disciplines upon which organizations could be developed: (a) personal mastery, (b) mental models, (c) building shared vision, (d) team learning, and (e) systems thinking. Regarding personal mastery, Senge states that "Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs" (1990, p. 129). Here Senge demonstrates the importance of continuous personal leaning, but also indicates that without collaboration and an exchange of ideas little impact is imparted onto the organization (Hardin, 2010). When discussing mental models, Senge suggests that unless you alter current mental models, very little systemic change will occur. Building shared vision and team learning are essential in moving an organization forward. Senge states that when an organization shares a vision and team learning emerges "a commonality of

direction emerges, and individuals' energies harmonize" (1990, p. 217). To address system thinking, Senge posits that for an organization to truly move forward, all members must be able to see the future of the collective and have an awareness of the future and orient their thinking accordingly with strategic planning.

As this idea of professional learning communities progressed certain themes began to emerge from various writers such as Michael Fullan and Roland Barth. These themes include a high value on both student and adult learning, a shared responsibility for seeking, sharing, and acting on ideas, but most of all a systematic approach to the collaborative processes. In other words, professional learning communities establish a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected and inclusive.

Summary

Given that professional learning communities have been at the forefront of most modern school reform movements for the past decade and that school leaders associate school success with the implementation of professional learning communities, a thorough understanding of what makes them work is logical. Since the research and literature suggests that there is a significant relationship between collective teacher efficacy and professional learning communities, which has a definite impact on the culture and climate of a school, leaders are well advised to make themselves knowledgeable about the dynamics involved with not only institutional psychology, but how teachers view themselves within the structure of the school and the school community and the impact of leadership on this viewpoint. Armed with this knowledge about how campuses operate will give assistant principals valuable insight into how to proceed with all aspects of the campus beginning with the formation and development of the faculty to the physical

structure of the school, which includes even the individual placement of teachers within the master schedule and the physical plant itself. Knowing that giving a teacher a course that he is comfortable teaching or having the motivation to learn how to teach can drastically impact that individual teacher's perceived efficacy which translates into his contributions to the collective teacher efficacy of the campus thus enhancing the establishment of the professional learning community and the overall positive nature of the school's culture.

Throughout the literature, leadership and culture are intertwined. Organizational and leadership theorists alike hold that a leader's perceptions and behaviors are significant, if not primary, determinants of an organization's culture and climate. Given that the assistant principal is exceeded in positional authority only by the principal at a school and the fact that assistant principals will have an impact in all visible and inner workings of the school, there is a need to examine the correlation between the assistant principal's leadership perspectives and school culture by studying the perceptions and beliefs of assistant principals.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The purpose of the study was to examine the beliefs and perceptions of assistant principals regarding the factors necessary for a school to be considered a good school and how they described the culture and climate of good schools. This chapter describes the methods used to investigate these questions and is organized into the following sections: Research Design, Participants, Instrumentation, Procedures, and Limitations.

Research Design

This study was an exploratory inquiry using a subset of the archived data from a much larger, multi-phase study of principals and assistant principals in the Gulf Coast Region of Southeast Texas. It was part of phase one of the study and focused exclusively on the section of the survey dealing with assistant principal's perceptions of the qualities of a good school and more specifically the qualities of the culture of a good school. The original survey project used a cross-sectional, cognitive interview design and targeted subjects who were currently serving as principals in Texas K-12 public schools. As a course requirement, graduate students in a master's degree program administered the survey questionnaire to principals in an interview setting over an eighteen-month period. The resulting data from the principal survey project was then compiled and archived in a database for use in future research projects on specific aspects of school leadership.

While phase one of the project used predominately quantitative survey research methods, the school culture section of the survey consisted entirely of open-ended questions that lend themselves to the type of interpretive analysis associated with qualitative research. In addition, responses were analyzed for significant relationships

with selected assistant principal and campus demographics. As a result, a qualitative research approach was employed in the analysis phase of this study.

Participants

The participants in this study were 371 current campus assistant principals. No other school or district personnel were involved in this survey project. Although 3 non public school assistant principals were included in this survey, it primarily represents the perceptions of public school assistant principals. With regard to demographics, respondents included 235 female and 105 male assistant principals with 31 not reporting and an ethnic breakdown of 52% Anglo, 25% African-American, and 18% Hispanic. This breakdown, represented in Table 3.1 and 3.2, is based on the research participants' self-reported data.

Table 3.1

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Gender

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	31	8.3%
Female	235	63.3%
Male	105	28.3%
Total	371	100.0%

Table 3.2

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Ethnicity

Ethnicity	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	1	0.2%
Am. Indian/Asian/Pacific	11	2.9%
African American	94	25.3%
Hispanic	70	18.8%
Anglo	195	52.5%
Total	371	100%

All public schools in the state of Texas are given a state accountability rating (Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-performing) based on student achievement, attendance, and dropout rates. Assistant principals were asked to self-report their accountability rating in the survey. Responding assistant principals represented schools in each of the following categories as illustrated in Figure 3.3: 9.4% Exemplary, 27.2% Recognized, 51.2% Acceptable, and 5.3% Low Performing. 6.7% of the respondents did not include their campus' state accountability rating in their survey. This could be due to the fact that they are private, charter, or new schools that are not currently subject to the state's accountability rating.

Table 3.3

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Campus TEA Accountability Ratings

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	25	6.7%
Exemplary	35	9.4%
Recognized	101	27.2%
Acceptable	190	51.2%
Low Performing	20	5.3%
Total	371	100%

With regard to grade levels served, assistant principals identified themselves as being a part of schools that were classified as elementary, middle, and high schools. The 371 responses included assistant principals from 126 elementary schools (K-5), 71 middle schools (6-8), and 58 high schools (9-12). The remaining 116 schools' grade levels were not reported.

Participants also represented three geographic settings: rural, suburban, and urban. Almost half, 43.0% (160), of the assistant principals surveyed were an administrator at a suburban school. Urban assistant principals accounted for 53.6% (199) of the respondents, and 3.2% (12) classified their schools being located in a rural setting. Student enrollment among the 371 schools varied greatly depending on the geographic location, grade levels served, and purpose of the school. The largest enrollment was at a suburban high school with over 4,000 students while the smallest was less than 30 students.

Instrumentation

The administrator survey questionnaire was developed by university professors at a major doctoral granting institution in a large, urban area in the south-central area of the United States for use in graduate-level courses in educational leadership. The overall survey instrument included 115 items, 22 of which dealt with assistant principals' backgrounds and school demographics. 62 were Likert-scaled items, and 31 were open-ended questions requiring in-depth, descriptive answers. The survey was organized into 14 sections, designated as Sections A through N, with each section specifically focused on a particular aspect of school leadership. This study focused on the open-ended responses to Section B of the survey concerning assistant principal's perceptions on which characteristics are present in "good schools" as opposed to "fair or poor" schools and how a school's values impact the overall culture of the school. By using an open-ended question, the respondents were able to express their views in as much detail as they wanted, without being restricted to a predetermined range of answers.

The two research questions contained in this section of the study were:

1. Much of the current educational leadership literature focuses on effective schools and more currently how we develop our schools as community. The new nomenclature currently used is "good school." How would you describe a good school?
2. For our purposes school culture is described as "What the school values." How would you describe the culture of a good school?

Procedures

The designers of the survey had several factors to consider when deciding how to administer the survey. Beyond reporting demographics, the questions on the survey were complex and designed to elicit reflective responses. Due to the length and complexity of the survey questions, sending out the survey by mail or electronically was considered impractical. It was unrealistic to expect busy assistant principals to take time from their schedules to complete the survey in its entirety. In addition, the designers were concerned with respondent fatigue when completing such a long survey. Under these conditions, the designers chose to use a cognitive interview protocol guided by an interviewer. It was believed this protocol would allow the principals to give quality answers throughout the survey due to the fact they were interacting with another person.

The cognitive interview protocol was implemented in this study by having students in the university's Master's degree program in Educational Leadership administer the survey. A benefit of using the cognitive interview protocol was that the resulting data contained the type of insights normally found in qualitative studies and interviews while maintaining the quantitative characteristics of traditional surveys (Willis, 2005). While utilizing this type of interview protocol was time consuming, it allowed the interviewers to make sure the assistant principals understood each question's intent and answered appropriately. Class time was dedicated to familiarizing the students with the survey instrument and the overall goals of the study. They were also trained in both traditional survey and cognitive interview techniques prior to their fieldwork in interviewing subjects. A portion of each student's grade in the course was based on his/her satisfactorily completing the required number of surveys, thereby helping insure

the dedication of the individuals charged with administering the survey. The student interviewers were permitted to choose which assistant principals they would interview, presumably administrators in the same district in which they worked. The survey designers hoped this connection would help insure the assistant principals' commitment by appealing to their roles in mentoring and developing future school leaders. The data collected from these interviews was then maintained by the university as an archival source for analyses in researching various questions regarding public school leadership from an administrator's perspective, such as this study.

The open-ended nature of the survey questions was intended to give administrators the most freedom and flexibility in their responses. As a result, one of the first steps in working with the data was to identify, categorize, and code the themes that emerged from the two open-ended questions. This allowed the responses to be classified according to their commonalities, thereby leading to useful insights about these assistant principals' collective views about the characteristics of a good school and school culture. Once the main themes were identified, these themes were given an operational definition, and each response was assigned to one of these categorical definitions. Where responses included aspects of multiple categories, the main aspect from the response was used for coding purposes. The predominant themes for each of the questions were identified and are discussed in the next chapter.

Limitations

There are four limitations to this study. During the data collection process for this study, graduate students were allowed to choose any four administrators to interview for this study resulting in a convenience sample. If an administrator chose not to participate,

the graduate student simply found a replacement administrator who volunteered. Because of this, there is no way to guarantee that assistant principals as a population were represented in the sample. Also, the number of assistant principals who chose not to participate was not reported.

Second, while the survey was administered to administrators exclusively, they were asked to give their perceptions about school culture in general which encompasses all stakeholders of the school, including counselors, teachers and students. While the assistant principals are certainly knowledgeable in the area, it would have been beneficial to survey teachers, counselors, and students to obtain first-hand data on their perceptions of the characteristics of a good school and school culture. If the same survey questions were posed to teachers, counselors, and students, different answers and perspectives might have been obtained.

Third, because this study relied on archived data, it was impossible to verify the integrity of the data set or assess whether or not errors were made in the coding, organization, or retrieval of the data set. This is a limitation of all archived, secondary data sets. Finally, since the interviewers did not record their sessions, it is possible that some of the data collected could have been transcribed incorrectly or imbued with the transcriber's sense making as opposed to the respondent's original meaning. There was no way to check the validity of the responses turned in by the graduate students for the survey because of this lack of record.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The purpose of the study was to examine the beliefs and perceptions of assistant principals regarding the factors necessary for a school to be considered a good school and how they describe the culture and climate of good schools. The survey data is a result of a multi-phase study of principals and assistant principals in the Gulf Coast Region of Southeast Texas. The data was part of phase one of the study, and this study focused exclusively on the section of the survey dealing with assistant principal's perceptions of the qualities of a good school and more specifically the qualities of the culture of a good school. The original survey project used a combination of a traditional survey design along with a cross-sectional, cognitive interview design and targeted subjects who were currently serving as principals and assistant principals in Texas K-12 public schools.

The survey interview collected both individual and demographic data on the assistant principals themselves, as well as campus demographic data where the assistant principals worked. Individual demographic data selected for use in this study included:

- Gender; and
- Years of experience as an assistant principal

Campus demographic data used in this study included:

- State accountability rating (i.e., exemplary, recognized, acceptable, and low performing);
- Community type (i.e., rural, urban, suburban); and
- Grade levels served by the campus.

A description of each variable, including the frequency and percentage, is presented in Tables Table 4.1 – Table 4.5. The sample included 371 assistant principals from Texas. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics to show the demographic data and background characteristics of the assistant principals in this study. This background data was analyzed when each of the two open-ended questions asked in the survey were considered.

1. What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding the characteristics of a good school?
2. What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding how they describe the culture of a good school?

Participants' Gender. As illustrated in Table 4.1, more of the assistant principals participating in this study were women (*N* = 235, 63.3%) than men (*N* = 105, 28.3%), with 8.3% not reporting their gender.

Table 4.1

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Gender

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	31	8.3%
Female	235	63.3%
Male	105	28.3%
Total	371	100.0%

Participants' Years of Experience as a campus administrator. Participants were asked to self-report their years of experience as an assistant principal. However, the survey questionnaire did not provide for categorical ranges for responses to this question; therefore, ranges were devised and the assistant principals' responses were assigned. The data in Table 4.2 provides a summary of these ranges. The majority of the participants had 3 years or less experience as an assistant principal (*N* = 186, 50.1%).

Table 4.2

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	5	1.0%
1-3	186	50.1%
4-6	80	21.6%
7-9	49	13.2%
10-15	40	10.8%
16+	11	3.0%
Total	371	100%

Participants' Campus TEA Accountability Ratings. All public schools in the state of Texas are given a state accountability rating (exemplary, recognized, acceptable, and low performing) based on student achievement, attendance, and dropout rates. Participants were asked to self-report the accountability rating of their current campus. As shown in Table 4.3, assistant principals' reporting of their schools' ratings indicated the majority were from schools who received the TEA accountability rating of acceptable

(*N* = 190, 51.2%) and recognized (*N* = 101, 27.2%). Texas accountability ratings were not reported for 25 of the schools included in the survey results.

Table 4.3

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Campus TEA Accountability Ratings

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	25	6.7%
Exemplary	35	9.4%
Recognized	101	27.2%
Acceptable	190	51.2%
Low Performing	20	5.3%
Total	371	100%

Participants' Districts' Geographical Setting. As part of the survey interview, assistant principals were asked to report their schools' classification as "Urban," "Suburban," or "Rural" based on what the questionnaire termed "Location." Demonstrated in Table 4.4, assistant principals in the sample were predominately from urban (*N* = 199, 53.6%) and suburban districts (*N* = 160, 43.0%). Assistant principals from rural districts (*N* = 12, 3.2%) made up a smaller percentage of the total number of respondents (*N* = 371, 100%).

Table 4.4

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Districts' Geographical Setting

Geographical Setting	*f*	% of Total
Rural	12	3.2%
Suburban	160	43.0%
Urban	199	53.6%
Total	371	100%

Participants' Campus Grade Levels. The study included assistant principals working in a wide variety of school settings. For the purposes of this study, high schools are defined as those serving grades 9-12; middles schools are defined to include schools serving any mix of grades 6-8; elementary schools are defined as those serving pre-kindergarten through grade 5. Table 4.5 demonstrates that assistant principals represented elementary schools (*N* = 126, 34.0%), middle schools (*N* = 71, 19.1%), high schools (*N* = 58, 15.6%), with 31.3% of the respondents not reporting their grade level.

Table 4.5

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Campus Grade Levels

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	116	31.3%
Elementary School	126	34.0%
Middle School	71	19.1%
High School	58	15.6%
Total	371	100%

In addition to the demographic information collected, an open-ended interview design was used purposefully in the subsequent sections in an effort to allow the respondents the most freedom possible in their answers. Given the open-ended nature of responses and the variety of answers given, the first step in the analysis of the data required the extraction of the naturally occurring, research-based themes and to categorize them into related groups. This was accomplished by reviewing each response individually and identifying the main theme of the response. Once the responses were grouped by theme, these themes were examined for commonalities and some of the themes were combined. The wording of the themes was derived from the current literature, and the result of this process was that the varied, naturally occurring responses of the assistant principals were categorized into the themes for examination.

Research Question One: *What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding the characteristics of a good school*?

Given the nature of the survey and the fact that it was presented in the form of an open-ended interview question to 371 individual assistant principals, there were as many original responses. Six categories were derived from the responses and were categorized as: (1) a good school is focused on student achievement; (2) a good school functions in a collaborative manner in terms of professional development, collegiality, and with a collective teacher efficacy, such as is found in a Professional Learning Community; (3) a good school has a positive climate; (4) a good school has strong leadership; (5) a good school has parental and community involvement; and (6) a good school has a focus on student discipline and strong structures and procedures. Due to the open-ended nature of the question, some responses fell into more than one category.

Table 4.6 describes the frequency of assistant principal responses when the total numbers of responses were combined. There were also instances where assistant principals, due to the open-ended nature of the interview, provided multiple responses to the question. There were a total of 525 combined responses. A focus on Student Achievement was the highest reported category with 181 (34.5%) responses. The second highest reported category was Professional Learning Communities with 117 (22.3%) responses. Positive Climate was the third highest reported category with 91 (17.3%) responses. Strong Leadership was the fourth highest reported category with 68 (13.0%) responses. The fifth highest reported category was Parental and Community Involvement with 53 (10.1%) responses. The category with the fewest responses was Student Discipline with 15 (2.9%) responses.

Table 4.6

Frequency of Assistant Principals' Descriptions of a Good School in Combined Categories (N = 371)

Responses	*f*	% of Total
Student Achievement	181	34.5%
Professional Learning Communities	117	22.3%
Positive Climate	91	17.3%
Strong Leadership	68	13.0%
Parental & Community Involvement	53	10.1%
Student Discipline	15	2.9%
Total	525	100%

Categories Describing a Good School

Focus on Student Achievement

There were numerous responses that categorized a good school as having a Focus on Student Achievement. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"A good school teaches students how to think as individuals and prepares them for life. The focus is not only on grades but on personal development as well."

"Students are actively engaged in learning and teachers are involved in staff development to improve teaching."

"A good school has high educational standards."

"One in which all stakeholders are vested and the focus is on the students achievement is evident."

"One where all involved parties have taken ownership of education, and students progress is main focus."

"Focus is always on student achievement."

"Proficient learning school where results are a priority among all stakeholders. Increasing expectancy results. It is not a matter if the school is in a poverty stricken environment or a low socio-economic area. These factors have nothing to do with defining a 'good school'."

"A school in which students achieve at a high level, supported by teachers who use their knowledge of effective educational practices to teach at high levels."

"One in which all stakeholders are vested and the focus on student achievement is evident."

The common theme in the responses categorized under a focus on student achievement was that student achievement drives the school's mission. According to the respondents, a focus on student achievement prepares the entire student population, not just certain demographics of the campus, for the next phase of life by setting high academic standards and focusing on sound teaching practices.

Table 4.7 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school. 108 female assistant principals (59.7%) identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school, while only 57 male assistant principals (31.5%) did so. There were 16 respondents (8.8%) who identified a focus on student achievement was a characteristic of a good school but did not report their gender.

Table 4.7

Focus on Student Achievement and Gender (N = 181)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	16	8.8%
Female	108	59.7%
Male	57	31.5%
Total	181	100.0%

Table 4.8 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. The table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals, by years of experience as an assistant

principal, which identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school. Respondents who had three years or less of experience as an assistant principal identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school more often than their counterparts with more experience.

Table 4.8

Focus on Student Achievement and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 181)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	6	3.3%
1-3	87	48.1%
4-6	43	23.8%
7-9	20	11.0%
10-15	20	11.0%
16+	5	2.8%
Total	181	100%

Table 4.9 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.9

Focus on Student Achievement and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 181)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	15	8.3%
Exemplary	13	7.2%
Recognized	37	20.4%
Acceptable	103	57.0%
Low Performing	13	7.2%
Total	181	100%

Table 4.10 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school. As shown below, the representative group's predominant community type was in an urban setting.

Table 4.10

Focus on Student Achievement and Community Type (N = 181)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	4	2.2%
Rural	6	3.3%
Suburban	78	43.1%
Urban	93	51.4%
Total	181	100%

Table 4.11 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.11

Focus on Student Achievement and Campus Grade Levels (N = 181)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	62	34.3%
Elementary School	44	24.3%
Middle School	40	22.1%
High School	35	19.3%
Total	181	100%

Professional Learning Communities

There were many responses that categorized a good school as one that functions in a collaborative manner in terms of professional development, collegiality, and with a collective teacher efficacy, such as is found in a Professional Learning Community. Examples of the responses given were:

> *"In good schools, teachers should work together, have fun together, play together all for the sake of the children. When the teachers get along, it is better for the students. Kids see that. Teachers should trust each other and agree on many things and what they cannot agree on, they should know how to disagree on there."*

"It is a combination of everything. Team. Teachers and parents and principals working together toward a common goal of quality education."

"Where genuine collaboration daily occurs to plan, improve learning and intervention for students. Also, students and staff express and treat each other with dignity and respect."

"A learning community working together to help kids succeed."

"A school where teacher & staff collaborate with teams & across curriculum/grade levels, using assessment data & best practices, to make decisions in order to make all students successful."

"A school where teachers collaborate and implement staff development."

"Teachers working collaboratively and all towards the same goal."

"Collaborative and Learning Communities."

"Involves learning community in decision-making, student achievement is foundation for decisions."

The common theme in these responses was that good schools show characteristics of a professional working environment where all stakeholders' voices are heard and held in high regard. The decisions are made collaboratively, all for the betterment of the organization. Professional development is seen as a key component and the members of the organization are integral parts of the staff development process. Teachers learn from each other through trust, modeling, and mentoring.

Table 4.12 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in

Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of a good school. 77 female assistant principals (65.8%) identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of a good school, while only 25 male assistant principals (21.4%) did so.

Table 4.12

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Gender (N = 117)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	15	12.8%
Female	77	65.8%
Male	25	21.4%
Total	117	100.0%

Table 4.13 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.13

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 117)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	3	2.6%
1-3	58	49.6%
4-6	24	20.5%
7-9	14	12.0%
10-15	15	12.8%
16+	3	2.6%
Total	117	100%

Table 4.14 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.14

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 117)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	13	11.1%
Exemplary	14	12.0%
Recognized	37	31.6%
Acceptable	45	38.5%
Low Performing	8	6.8%
Total	117	100%

Table 4.15 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of a good school. 63 (53.8%) assistant principals, more than half of those who identified elements of a Professional Learning Community, reported that they were on campuses in an urban setting.

Table 4.15

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Community Type (N = 117)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	5	4.3%
Rural	2	1.7%
Suburban	47	40.2%
Urban	63	53.8%
Total	117	100%

Table 4.16 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.16

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Campus Grade Levels (N = 117)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	34	29.1%
Elementary School	49	41.9%
Middle School	19	16.2%
High School	15	12.8%
Total	117	100%

Positive Climate

There were numerous responses that categorized a Positive Climate as a characteristic of a good school. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"Positive climate for teachers and students; high moral for teachers; safe environment."

"Making our school a welcoming and pleasant experience is very important and making sure it is a positive place for the students to grow."

"The school should be a place where a positive climate exists. Atmosphere of trust and safety."

"Great staff. Positive atmosphere. High staff morale. The kids are excited about school. Team work is necessary."

"A school where everyone feels welcome and is eager to learn. School has harmony, support between employees and students are excited and happy to be there."

"Positive student learning environment."

"A good school is one with an excellent culture and an excellent climate when you walk into it. Right away, you can always tell when a school has an excellent climate. A good school involves many different factors, but mostly when the administrators, staff, and students respect each other."

"A good school is one that provides a safe and fair environment for every studnet to learn."

"A school that makes learning an enjoyable experience for children. An environment that is safe for students, where they can explore their thoughts and ideas freely."

The common theme in these responses was that good schools have a positive climate. These responses assert that schools with healthy and positive climates created environments where students and teachers were happy, respectful and safe with the overall environment being one that is orderly, inviting, and clean.

Table 4.17 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.17

Positive Climate and Gender (N = 91)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	8	8.8%
Female	58	63.7%
Male	25	27.5%
Total	91	100.0%

Table 4.18 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience that identified a positive climate as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.18

Positive Climate and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 91)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	3	3.3%
1-3	44	48.4%
4-6	21	23.1%
7-9	12	13.2%
10-15	8	8.8%
16+	3	3.3%
Total	91	100%

Table 4.19 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.19

Positive Climate and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 91)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	11	12.1%
Exemplary	11	12.1%
Recognized	20	22.0%
Acceptable	45	49.5%
Low Performing	4	4.4%
Total	91	100%

Table 4.20 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.20

Positive Climate and Community Type (N = 91)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	2.2%
Rural	3	3.3%
Suburban	48	52.7%
Urban	38	41.8%
Total	91	100%

Table 4.21 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.21

Positive Climate and Campus Grade Levels (N = 91)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	31	34.1%
Elementary School	35	38.5%
Middle School	13	14.3%
High School	12	13.2%
Total	91	100%

Strong Leadership

There were numerous responses that categorized a good school as having a strong leadership. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"Leadership. Because good leadership produces good teachers and good teacher produce good learners. I do mean good leadership produces good teachers."

"Effective and instructional leader who guides staff."

"Leadership is critical to bringing all of the pieces together."

"Established clear expectations, established efficient systems and processes."

"One where the principal is the model for the teachers to follow, sets the tone of the school, available, accessible, knowledgeable about classroom and teachers abilities, and all aspects of school administration."

"A good school has strong leadership; a teaching staff that is empowered by the strong leadership; a staff that shares knowledge and a management style that is consistent."

"A good school has good leaders that understand that nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning."

"A good school is one that has strong leadership, collaboration is evident, and high expectations are in place."

The main theme in the responses categorized under Strong Leadership revolved around the concept of strong campus leadership. According to the respondents, in order for a campus to be a good school the leader or leaders on that campus must have a clear vision for the direction of the campus and be able to nurture and sustain campus growth as they move towards that vision. These leaders must be visible and available to the faculty and must set the tone for the campus by modeling the appropriate behaviors and setting clear expectations for all stakeholders.

Table 4.22 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.22

Strong Leadership and Gender (N = 68)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	4	5.9%
Female	46	67.6%
Male	18	26.5%
Total	68	100.0%

Table 4.23 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience that identified strong leadership as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.23

Strong Leadership and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 68)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	3	4.4%
1-3	38	55.9%
4-6	18	26.5%
7-9	4	5.9%
10-15	4	5.9%
16+	1	1.5%
Total	68	100%

Table 4.24 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.24

Strong Leadership and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 68)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	8	11.8%
Exemplary	6	8.8%
Recognized	26	38.2%
Acceptable	26	38.2%
Low Performing	2	2.9%
Total	68	100%

Table 4.25 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.25

Strong Leadership and Community Type (N = 68)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	2.9%
Rural	2	2.9%
Suburban	22	32.4%
Urban	42	61.8%
Total	68	100%

Table 4.26 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.26

Strong Leadership and Campus Grade Levels (N = 68)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	19	27.9%
Elementary School	24	35.3%
Middle School	16	23.5%
High School	9	13.2%
Total	68	100%

Parental and Community Involvement

There were numerous responses that categorized a good school as having active parental and community involvement. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"Includes participation from all stake holders (teachers, staff, students, and community)."

"Learner-centered instruction, parental involvement, continual improvement, vision, small learning communities."

"Kids want to come, has buy-in from parents and community."

"Feeling, have a lot of parent interaction/involvement, student achievement, teacher leaders."

"I also feel that parents and the community need to be involved and supportive."

"A good school is a place where kids are learning, feel safe and are valued. Teachers are excited about teaching and parents are partnering with the school."

"At its core, a good school is one that prioritizes the development of warm, caring and empathetic relationships within its community."

"A good school is one where teachers have high expectations for "all" students. Also, the difference between a good school and a great school is the involvement of its parents. It makes a difference."

The common theme in the responses categorized under a strong parental and community involvement element was that relationships with the community is key to establishing a warm and friendly place, where students want to attend and one that,

through its relationship with the community, has established a relevance to the learning which engages the students at a very high level.

Table 4.27 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.27

Parental & Community Involvement and Gender (N = 53)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	7	13.2%
Female	30	56.6%
Male	16	30.2%
Total	53	100.0%

Table 4.28 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience that identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.28

Parental & Community Involvement and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 53)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	4	7.5%
1-3	23	43.4%
4-6	10	18.9%
7-9	6	11.3%
10-15	7	13.2%
16+	3	5.7%
Total	53	100%

Table 4.29 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.29

Parental & Community Involvement and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 53)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	6	11.3%
Exemplary	6	11.3%
Recognized	15	28.3%
Acceptable	24	45.3%
Low Performing	2	3.8%
Total	53	100%

Table 4.30 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.30

Parental & Community Involvement and Community Type (N = 53)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	4	7.5%
Rural	1	1.9%
Suburban	27	50.9%
Urban	21	39.6%
Total	53	100%

Table 4.31 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.31

Parental & Community Involvement and Campus Grade Levels (N = 53)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	14	26.4%
Elementary School	24	45.3%
Middle School	4	7.5%
High School	11	20.8%
Total	53	100%

Student Discipline

There were numerous responses that categorized student discipline as a characteristic of a good school. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"You can tell when you walk through the front door what the culture is. Discipline has to do with it."

"One where I don't see kids acting up all the time, one with little distractions and high education."

"Discipline standards are communicated and enforced and expectations are communicated and practiced."

"School wide discipline plan."

"Effective teaching and learning, discipline enforced, effective communication among staff and faculty, and students are motivated."

"Culture of discipline where continuous improvement is paramount, relationships and relevance are valued and implemented."

The common theme in the responses categorized under student discipline focused on campuses which had low instances of discipline incidents and where there was a culture of discipline and discipline standards were communicated and enforced while expectations were communicated and practiced.

Table 4.32 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified student discipline as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.32

Student Discipline and Gender (N = 15)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	1	6.7%
Female	12	80.0%
Male	2	13.3%
Total	15	100.0%

Table 4.33 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the

frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience that identified student discipline as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.33

Student Discipline and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 15)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	0	0.0%
1-3	10	66.7%
4-6	3	20.0%
7-9	1	6.7%
10-15	1	6.7%
16+	0	0.0%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.34 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified student discipline as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.34

Student Discipline and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 15)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	1	6.7%
Exemplary	2	13.3%
Recognized	6	40.0%
Acceptable	6	40.0%
Low Performing	0	0.0%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.35 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified student discipline as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.35

Student Discipline and Community Type (N = 15)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	0	0.0%
Rural	0	0.0%
Suburban	8	53.3%
Urban	7	46.7%
Total	15	100%

Table 4.36 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified student discipline as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.36

Student Discipline and Campus Grade Levels (N = 15)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	7	46.7%
Elementary School	5	33.3%
Middle School	2	13.3%
High School	1	6.7%
Total	15	100%

Research Question Two: *What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding how they describe the culture of a good school?*

Given the nature of the survey and the fact that it was presented in the form of an open-ended interview question to 371 individual assistant principals, there were as many original responses. As with research question one, six categories were derived from the responses and were categorized as a school with a good school culture having: (1) elements of a stable and professional environment as found in Professional Learning Communities; (2) a positive campus climate; (3) a focus on student achievement; (4) a central focus on valuing the student; (5) strong leadership; and (6) parental and community involvement. Due to the open-ended nature of the question some responses fell into more than one category.

Table 4.37 describes the frequency of assistant principal responses when the total numbers of responses were combined. There were also instances where assistant principals, due to the open-ended nature of the interview, provided multiple responses to the question. There were a total of 474 combined responses. Professional Learning Communities was the highest reported category with 126 (26.6%) responses. The second highest reported category was Positive Climate with 120 (25.3%) responses. A focus on Student Achievement was the third highest reported category with 104 (21.9%) responses. A focus on valuing the student was the fourth highest reported category with 57 (12.0%) responses. The fifth highest reported category was Parental and Community Involvement with 34 (7.2%) responses. The category with the fewest responses was Strong Leadership with 33 (7.0%) responses.

Table 4.37

Frequency of Assistant Principals' Descriptions of the Culture of a Good School in Combined Categories (N = 371)

Responses	*f*	% of Total
Professional Learning Communities	126	26.6%
Positive Climate	120	25.3%
Student Achievement	104	21.9%
Valuing the Student	57	12.0%
Parental & Community Involvement	34	7.2%
Strong Leadership	33	7.0%
Total	474	100%

Categories Describing the Culture of a Good School

Professional Learning Communities

There were many responses that categorized the culture of a good school as one that functions in a collaborative manner in terms of professional development, collegiality, and with a collective teacher efficacy, such as is found in a Professional Learning Community. Examples of the responses given were:

"A school that works together as a team to educate students."

"One where all the teachers agree on something and stick with it."

"There is a cultural community in the school with effective relationships among parents, students, and staff."

"A good school is one that practices professional learning communities. The focus is on students and learning. Teachers have the support they need and the school does whatever it takes to foster learning. Collaboration with a purpose and data and results driven."

"A school in which common goals are held and teachers believe in the efficacy of their teaching."

"A good campus focuses on being a professional learning community."

"A good school is a learning community."

"A good school uses Critical Friends Groups to develop professional learning communities."

"A good school embodies the concept of professional learning community."

The common theme in these responses was that schools with good culture show characteristics of a professional working environment where all stakeholders' voices are heard and held in high regard. The decisions are made collaboratively, all for the betterment of the organization. Professional development is seen as a key component and the members of the organization are integral parts of the staff development process. Teachers learn from each other through trust, modeling and mentoring.

Table 4.38 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic the culture of a school. 78 female assistant principals (61.9%) identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school, while only 38 male assistant principals (30.2%) did so.

Table 4.38

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Gender (N = 126)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	10	7.9%
Female	78	61.9%
Male	38	30.2%
Total	126	100.0%

Table 4.39 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience who identified a focus

on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.39

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 126)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	4	3.2%
1-3	69	54.8%
4-6	25	19.8%
7-9	17	13.5%
10-15	11	8.7%
16+	0	0.0%
Total	126	100%

Table 4.40 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.40

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 126)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	11	8.7%
Exemplary	13	10.3%
Recognized	30	23.8%
Acceptable	66	52.4%
Low Performing	6	4.8%
Total	117	100%

Table 4.41 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of the culture of a good school. 61 (48.4%) assistant principals, almost half of those who identified elements of a Professional Learning Community, reported that they were on campuses in an urban setting.

Table 4.41

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Community Type (N = 126)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	8	6.3%
Rural	2	1.6%
Suburban	55	43.7%
Urban	61	48.4%
Total	126	100%

Table 4.42 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified a focus on the elements of professionalism as those found in Professional Learning Communities as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.42

Focus on Professional Learning Communities and Campus Grade Levels (N = 126)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	40	31.7%
Elementary School	43	34.1%
Middle School	26	20.6%
High School	17	13.5%
Total	126	100%

Positive Climate

There were numerous responses that categorized a Positive Climate as a characteristic of the culture of a good school. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"A school that is warm and inviting where teachers and students want to come in their pursuit for knowledge and betterment of the future."

"From the moment you walk into the school you feel welcome and you can tell learning is happening. Learning is evident in all aspects of the schools culture."

"Positive climate where students are engaged in the learning process."

"A safe school where students feel welcome and all school staff has good relationships with the students."

"The school climate must be conducive to learning. The school itself should be clean, safe, well organized."

"A good school consists of the following: 1) A Climate of caring; 2) Commitment; 3) A climate of belonging; 4) A climate of safety; and 5) Personal Competency."

"A good school is a place that has a positive climate where students actually learn what they are supposed to learn and teachers enjoy teaching."

"A good school is a school that is safe and focuses on the students."

The common theme in these responses was that the culture of good schools has a positive climate. These responses assert that schools with healthy and positive climates created environments where students and teachers were happy, respectful and safe with the overall environment being one that is orderly, inviting and clean.

Table 4.43 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.43

Positive Climate and Gender (N = 120)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	14	11.7%
Female	71	59.2%
Male	35	29.2%
Total	120	100.0%

Table 4.44 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience which identified a positive climate as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.44

Positive Climate and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 120)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	1.7%
1-3	60	50.0%
4-6	26	21.7%
7-9	16	13.3%
10-15	12	10.0%
16+	4	3.3%
Total	120	100%

Table 4.45 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.45

Positive Climate and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 120)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	10	8.3%
Exemplary	14	11.7%
Recognized	31	25.8%
Acceptable	61	50.8%
Low Performing	4	3.3%
Total	120	100%

Table 4.46 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.46

Positive Climate and Community Type (N = 120)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	1	0.8%
Rural	2	1.7%
Suburban	50	41.7%
Urban	67	55.8%
Total	120	100%

Table 4.47 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified a positive climate as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.47

Positive Climate and Campus Grade Levels (N = 120)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	38	31.7%
Elementary School	42	35.0%
Middle School	24	20.0%
High School	16	13.3%
Total	120	100%

Focus on Student Achievement

There were numerous responses that categorized the culture of a good school as having a Focus on Student Achievement. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

> *"A good school teaches students how to think as individuals and prepares them for life. The focus is not only on grades but on personal development as well."*
>
> *"It is important to reach a balance between all aspects involved in teaching, learning and education. Understanding everyone's needs. Set high standards, give frequent assessment of progress, initiate a system of rewards and*

punishments. Are district goals being met? Are democratic values apparent in the student population?"

"One in which all stakeholders are vested and the focus is on the students acheivement is evident."

"One where all involved parties have taken ownership of education, and students progress is main focus."

"A school in which students achieve at a high level, supported by teachers who use their knowledge of effective educational practices to teach at high levels."

"One where student growth an development is a primary goal. Where performance and achievement reflect excellence in learning--high expectations and high standards."

"Culture focused on student achievement, where student achievement and successes are the cool thing to do."

"A good school is a school that is safe and focused on student achievement."

The common theme in the responses categorized under a focus on student achievement was that student achievement drives the school's mission. According to the respondents a focus on student achievement prepares all of the students, not just certain demographics of the campus, but the entire student population for the next phase of life by setting high academic standards and focusing on sound teaching practices.

Table 4.48 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school. 66 female assistant principals (63.5%) identified a focus on student

achievement as a characteristic of a good school, while only 30 male assistant principals (28.8%) did so. There were 8 respondents (7.7%) who identified a focus on student achievement was a characteristic of the culture of a good school but did not report their gender.

Table 4.48

Focus on Student Achievement and Gender (N = 104)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	8	7.7%
Female	66	63.5%
Male	30	28.8%
Total	104	100.0%

Table 4.49 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. The table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals, by years of experience as an assistant principal, which identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.49

Focus on Student Achievement and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 104)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	1.9%
1-3	49	47.1%
4-6	25	24.0%
7-9	10	9.6%
10-15	15	14.4%
16+	3	2.9%
Total	104	100%

Table 4.50 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.50

Focus on Student Achievement and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 104)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	8	7.7%
Exemplary	8	7.7%
Recognized	25	24.0%
Acceptable	59	56.7%
Low Performing	4	3.8%
Total	181	100%

Table 4.51 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school. As shown below, the representative group's predominant community type was in an urban setting.

Table 4.51

Focus on Student Achievement and Community Type (N = 104)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	4	3.8%
Rural	4	3.8%
Suburban	47	45.2%
Urban	49	47.1%
Total	104	100%

Table 4.52 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified a focus on student achievement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.52

Focus on Student Achievement and Campus Grade Levels (N = 104)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	33	31.7%
Elementary School	29	27.9%
Middle School	21	20.2%
High School	21	20.2%
Total	104	100%

Valuing the Student

There were numerous responses that categorized student discipline as a characteristic of the culture of a good school. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"One that values children. That's the customer."

"All decisions are made with the best interests of the students in mind."

"Values in the students, students should be the focus."

"Students are the top priority of the school. Meeting the needs of the whole child."

"The value should be that all students learn regardless of ethnicity. The priority is student learning."

"The culture of a good school puts students first. Teachers shold be doing what is best for students."

"A school that values student learning for all students."

"A good school's culture is one where children and their needs are first and foremost. That's what we are here for."

The common theme in the responses categorized under valuing the student focused on a mindset that the students come first. Academic and affective learning should be at the forefront of all planning for the campus.

Table 4.53 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified valuing the student as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.53

Valuing the Student and Gender (N = 57)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	2	3.5%
Female	41	71.9%
Male	14	24.6%
Total	57	100.0%

Table 4.54 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience that identified valuing the student as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.54

Valuing the Student and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 57)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	1	1.8%
1-3	31	54.4%
4-6	10	17.5%
7-9	6	10.5%
10-15	7	12.3%
16+	2	3.5%
Total	57	100%

Table 4.55 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified valuing the student as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.55

Valuing the Student and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 57)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	3	5.3%
Exemplary	6	10.5%
Recognized	15	26.3%
Acceptable	28	49.1%
Low Performing	5	7.5%
Total	57	100%

Table 4.56 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified valuing the student as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.56

Valuing the Student and Community Type (N = 57)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	3.5%
Rural	3	5.3%
Suburban	23	40.4%
Urban	29	50.9%
Total	57	100%

Table 4.57 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified valuing the student as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.57

Valuing the Student and Campus Grade Levels (N = 57)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	14	24.6%
Elementary School	18	31.6%
Middle School	11	19.3%
High School	14	24.6%
Total	57	100%

Parental and Community Involvement

There were numerous responses that categorized the culture of a good school as having active parental and community involvement. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

> *"Strong interactions by community members (teachers/parents/students), all working together."*
>
> *"The culture of a good school values the opinions of the community, students and faculty. Modern day schools do not value the community aka stakeholders as we once have."*

"It goes to old saying it takes a village to raise a child, Diverse multicultural community."

"A school in which all stakeholders –teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators, parents, and community members work together to establish and maintain a common vision for the school as well as goals and standards to achieve that vision."

"High expectations for students and staff. Strong parent, teacher, student relationships. Successful student achievement focus; outcome-strong, productive citizens programs, clubs and organizations that benefit all inclusive atmosphere, with high energy."

The common theme in the responses categorized under a strong parental and community involvement element was that relationships with the community is key to establishing a warm and friendly place, where students want to attend and one that, through its relationship with the community, has established a relevance to the learning which engages the students at a very high level.

Table 4.58 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.58

Parental & Community Involvement and Gender (N = 34)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	2	5.9%
Female	21	61.8%
Male	11	32.4%
Total	34	100.0%

Table 4.59 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience which identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of a good school.

Table 4.59

Parental & Community Involvement and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 34)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	5.9%
1-3	9	26.5%
4-6	9	26.5%
7-9	3	8.8%
10-15	8	23.5%
16+	3	8.8%
Total	34	100%

Table 4.60 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.60

Parental & Community Involvement and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 34)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	3	8.8%
Exemplary	5	14.7%
Recognized	12	35.3%
Acceptable	12	35.3%
Low Performing	2	5.9%
Total	34	100%

Table 4.61 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.61

Parental & Community Involvement and Community Type (N = 34)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	1	2.9%
Rural	2	5.9%
Suburban	15	44.1%
Urban	16	47.1%
Total	34	100%

Table 4.62 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified strong parental and community involvement as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.62

Parental & Community Involvement and Campus Grade Levels (N = 34)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	13	38.2%
Elementary School	12	35.3%
Middle School	5	14.7%
High School	4	11.8%
Total	34	100%

Strong Leadership

There were numerous responses that categorized the culture of a good school as having strong leadership. Examples of the responses that assistant principals provided were:

"A good school culture has teachers who feel supported by administration. Everyone sees staff development as important and work together."

"Positive and nurturing relationships with students; strong instructional leadership and focus; recognition of student and teacher accomplishments."

"Staff members are trusted to do their job and leaders are open to discuss concerns as well as their ideas. Leaders have high expectations for their staff and that is not compromised."

"The good school will value orderly processes, systems, and expectations. Without this foundation learning will not and can not occur."

"Students and teachers are supported by administrators and the community as learning occurs."

"Supervision without adequate supporting resources or appropriate training is not likely to have an impact on instructional excellence."

"Effective communication, strong leadership, open, welcoming environment."

The main theme in the responses categorized under Strong Leadership revolved around the concept of strong campus leadership. According to the respondents, in order for a campus to develop and maintain the culture of a good school, the leader or leaders on that campus must have a clear vision for the direction of the campus and be able to nurture and sustain campus growth as they move towards that vision. These leaders must

be visible and available to the faculty and must set the tone for the campus by modeling the appropriate behaviors and setting clear expectations for all stakeholders.

Table 4.63 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by gender. This table provides the frequency and percentage of males and females who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.63

Strong Leadership and Gender (N = 33)

Gender	*f*	%
Not Reported	3	9.1%
Female	22	66.7%
Male	8	24.2%
Total	33	100.0%

Table 4.64 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by years of experience as an assistant principal. This table provides the frequency and percentage of respondents by years of experience which identified strong leadership as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.64

Strong Leadership and Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (N = 33)

Years of Experience	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	0	0.0%
1-3	19	57.6%
4-6	6	18.2%
7-9	3	9.1%
10-15	5	15.2%
16+	0	0.0%
Total	33	100%

Table 4.65 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus rating. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus rating who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.65

Strong Leadership and Campus TEA Accountability Ratings (N = 33)

Accountability Rating	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	2	6.1%
Exemplary	4	12.1%
Recognized	10	30.3%
Acceptable	15	45.5%
Low Performing	2	6.1%
Total	33	100%

Table 4.66 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by community type. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by community type who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.66

Strong Leadership and Community Type (N = 33)

Community Type	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	1	3.0%
Rural	2	6.1%
Suburban	11	33.3%
Urban	19	57.6%
Total	33	100%

Table 4.67 displays the pattern of responses that occurred when this category was examined by campus level. This table provides the frequency and percentage of assistant principals by campus level who identified strong leadership as a characteristic of the culture of a good school.

Table 4.67

Strong Leadership and Campus Grade Levels (N = 33)

Grade Levels	*f*	% of Total
Not Reported	11	33.3%
Elementary School	10	30.3%
Middle School	6	18.2%
High School	6	18.2%
Total	33	100%

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

Despite the fact that the assistant principal's roles and duties include "ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent responsibilities" (Marshall & Hooley, 2006), the comprehensive nature of the roles asked of them puts the assistant principal in a position to be qualified, almost uniquely so, to render a perspective on what is good in schools and what good schools look like. One possible method to discover this unique perspective is to examine their perceptions regarding the aspects of a school and solicit from them the qualities which they feel are necessary for a school to be considered good or necessary for a school to have a good culture.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the beliefs and perceptions of assistant principals regarding the factors necessary for a school to be considered a good school, and how they described the culture and climate of good schools. Given that the assistant principal is exceeded in positional authority only by the principal at a school and the fact that assistant principals will have an impact in all visible and inner workings of the school, there is a need to examine the relationship between the assistant principal's leadership perspectives and school culture by studying the perceptions and beliefs of assistant principals.

A convenience sample selection technique was used to collect the data for this study and then archived and maintained by the university as an archival source for analyses in researching various questions regarding public school leadership from an

assistant principal's perspective, such as this study. The data was collected through a cognitive interview protocol guided by an interviewer. Students in the university's Master's degree program in Educational Leadership administered the survey. The student interviewers were permitted to choose which principals they would interview, presumably administrators in the same district in which they worked. The survey was administered over a period of eighteen months, with different groups of graduate students administering the survey each semester during that time period.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher sought to study the beliefs of assistant principals regarding good schools and their cultures. Each of the two research questions was aligned with an item from the survey instrument. The survey asked the assistant principals to answer two questions concerning good schools and the culture of good schools. The intent of the questions was to discern any patterns in the responses of the assistant principals in the frequency or demographic factors. The following are the research questions examined in this study:

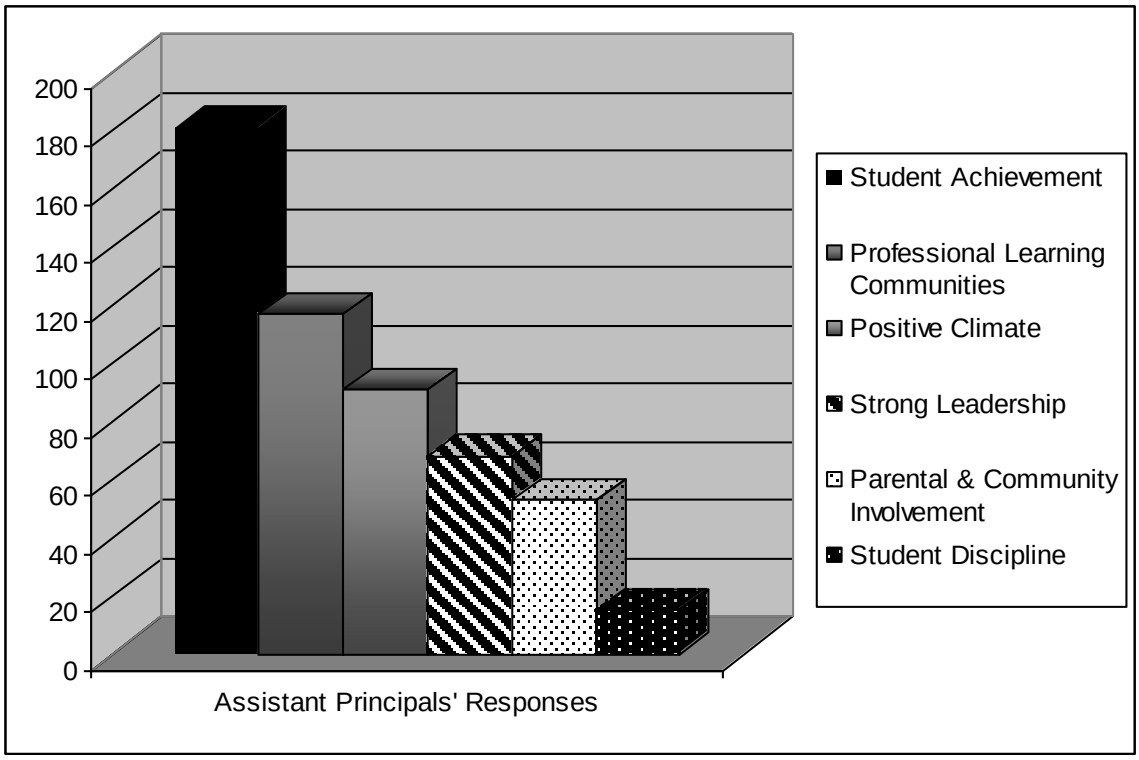
1. What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding the characteristics of a good school?
2. What are the perceptions of assistant principals regarding how they describe the culture of a good school?

Research Question One. The first research question addressed the perceptions of assistant principals regarding their beliefs on which characteristics would be present for a school to be considered good. The sample of 371 assistant principals provided 525 total responses. The open nature of the question allowed respondents to provide multiple

answers in their responses. Each answer to the question was categorized in one of six categories, and the following is a breakdown of the data into each category: Student Achievement (181, 34.5%); Professional Learning Communities (117, 22.3%); Positive Climate (91, 17.3%); Strong Leadership (68, 13.0%); Parental & Community Involvement (53, 10.1%); Student Discipline (15, 2.9%). As shown in figures 5.1 and 5.2, Student Achievement is viewed as the gauge by which over one third of the respondents believe determines whether a school should be considered good. This coincides with the findings of Williams (2011) in his study involving over 300 principals that investigated the perceptions of principals in this same area. In his study, when asked the same question, 34.7% of respondents stated that schools with an academic focus and successful results could be considered good.

Figure 5.1

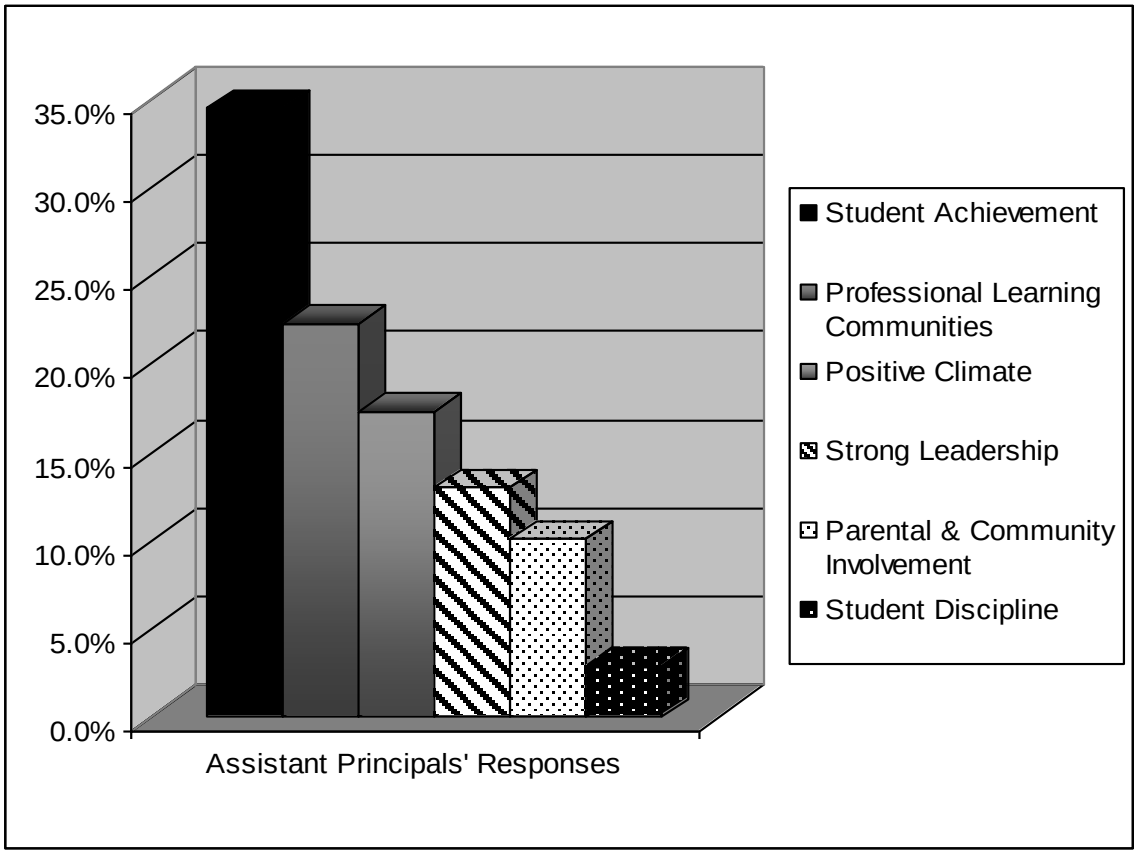
Assistant Principals' Responses – Research Question One



The next two categories in the Williams (2011) study of principal perceptions were Student Centered and Professional Development, which when combined, produced 21.6% of the responses. These findings coincide with this study's results that produced 22.3% of the responses for Professional Learning Communities, of which a student-centered focus and professional development are integral components.

Figure 5.2

Assistant Principals' Responses Percentages – Research Question One



Demographics. Each category was examined in relation to each of the demographics of the overall group of respondents in an effort to discern any differences. The demographic groups were gender, years of experience as an assistant principal,

current campus Texas Education Agency accountability rating, geographical setting, and current grade level.

When analyzing the background data of the assistant principals and their campuses in regard to research question one, several interesting findings were discovered. While female respondents only made up 63% of the survey group, 80% of the responses stating that student discipline was an essential component of a good school came from female respondents. Likewise, 50% of the respondent group was made up of assistant principals with three or fewer years of experience as an assistant principal, yet nearly 67% of the responses in the student discipline category came from this group. Another interesting result in the student discipline category was that 40% of the responses came from assistant principals from campuses with a Recognized Texas Education Agency accountability rating, yet they only made up 27% of the respondents for research question one.

Regarding the group of Parental and Community Involvement, 50% of the responses in this group came from assistant principals currently working in suburban schools, whereas only 39% of the responses came from assistant principals working in urban schools. This is in contradiction with the percentage breakdown of respondents. Only 43% of the respondents work in suburban schools while almost 54% work in urban schools.

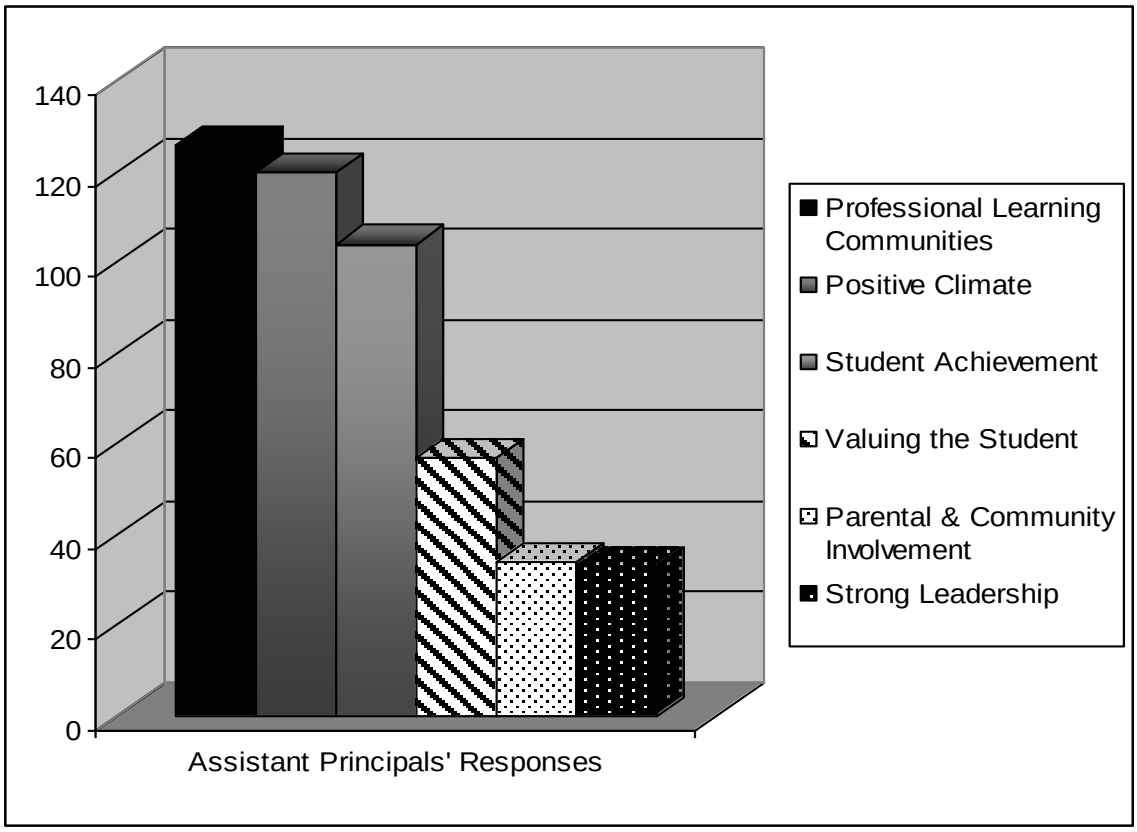
Finally, when the data was examined in relation to the respondent's grade level affiliation, almost 42% of the responses describing Professional Learning Communities as essential components of a good school were from elementary school assistant principals. The next group was the middle school assistant principals with only 16% of

the responses. In addition, while middle school assistant principals made up 19% of the responding group, only 7.5% of the responses indicating that parental and community involvement was essential for a school to be considered good came from that group. The final interesting result was that only one high school assistant principal of the 58 who participated indicated that student discipline was a component of a good school.

Research Question Two. The second research question addressed the perceptions of assistant principals regarding their beliefs on what are the characteristics of the culture of a good school. The sample of 371 assistant principals provided 474 total responses. The open nature of the question allowed respondents to provide multiple answers in their responses. Each answer to the question was categorized in one of six categories, and the following is a breakdown of the data in each category: Professional Learning Communities (126, 26.6%); Positive Climate (120, 25.3%); Student Achievement (104, 21.9%); Valuing the Student (57, 12.0%); Parental & Community Involvement (34, 7.2%); Strong Leadership (33, 7.0%). As shown in figures 5.3 and 5.4, schools which have professional learning communities in place, or components of what would be found within professional learning communities, were described as being a part of the culture for good schools.

Figure 5.3

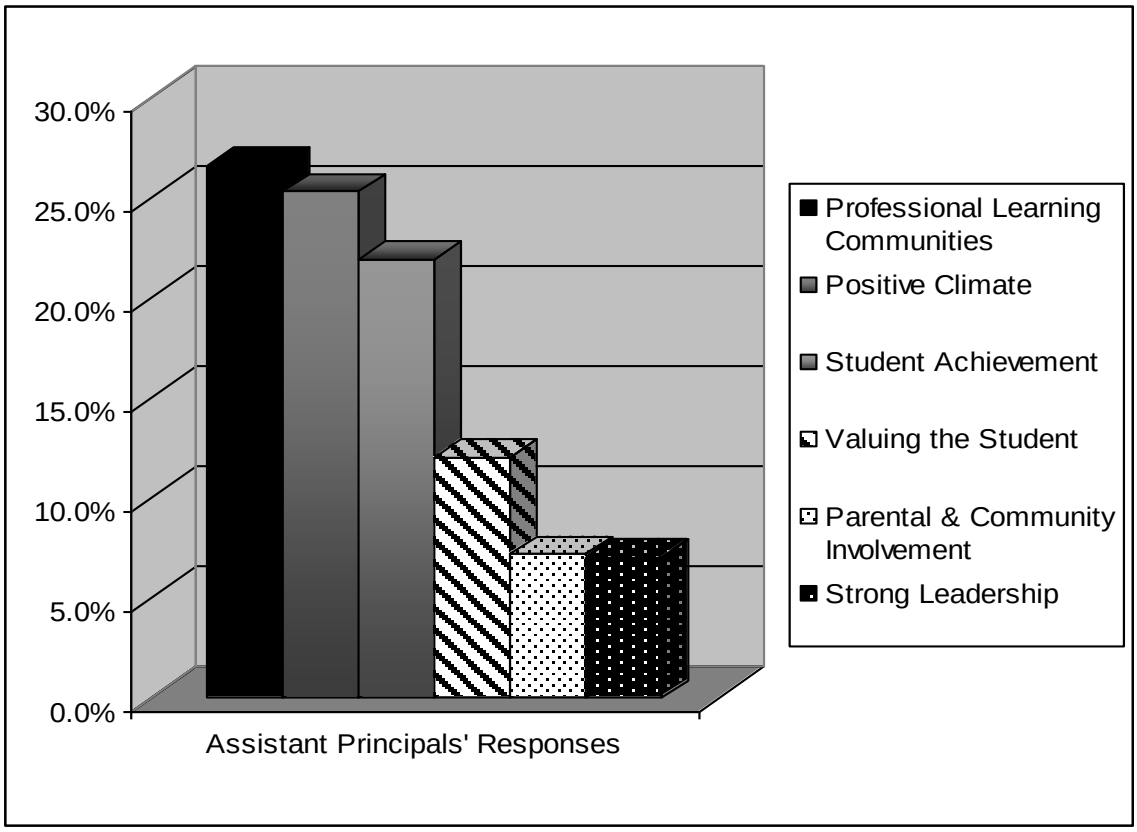
Assistant Principals' Responses – Research Question Two



These data are consistent with the results of a study by Berry, Johnson and Montgomery (2005) which suggested that a fundamental shift in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their daily work in the classroom has a significant impact on a change in the professional culture of the school.

Figure 5.4

Assistant Principals' Responses Percentages – Research Question Two



Demographics. Each category was examined regarding the demographics of the overall group of respondents in an effort to discern any differences. The demographic groups were gender, years of experience as an assistant principal, current campus Texas Education Agency accountability rating, geographical setting, and current grade level.

When analyzing the background data of the assistant principals and their campuses in regard to research question two, there were no compelling patterns in regard to gender. There were however, some interesting results in regards to the years of experience as an assistant principal and their beliefs concerning parental and community involvement. Although assistant principals with three years or less experience made up

50% of the respondents only 26.5% of the responses linked parental and community involvement to the culture of a good school. In contrast, almost one-third, 32.4%, of the responses that linked parental and community involvement to the culture of a good school came from assistant principals with 10 or more years of experience as an assistant principal. Additionally, as related to years of experience, none of the 11 assistant principals surveyed who had 16 or more years of experience as an assistant principal felt that strong leadership was a necessary component of the culture of a good school.

Another notable demographic was the Texas Education Agency accountability rating. In relation to the categories of Student Achievement and Parental and Community Involvement, at least one grouping's results were much lower than the overall percentage of respondents from the respective group. In the case of Student Achievement, only 3.8% of the responses came from assistant principals who work in low performing schools. This is in contrast to the fact that 5.3% of the respondents currently work in low performing schools. When examining the group of Parental and Community involvement an even larger disparity was discovered. Even though the number of assistant principals from schools with the TEA rating of acceptable was almost double the number of respondents of assistant principals from schools with the TEA rating of recognized, the number of responses in relation to whether parental and community involvement was a necessary component of the culture of good schools was the same.

The only other notable result illustrated by the data was the impact that high school assistant principals placed on the belief of valuing the student as being an important component to the culture of a good school. Despite the fact that only 15% of the respondents to the survey were high school assistant principals, they accounted for

25% of the responses stating that valuing the student was an important factor in the culture of a good school.

Future Research

During this study, additional areas were found in which future research could potentially add significant insight to our understanding of the characteristics that are consistently found in good schools along with the values and beliefs which translate into the culture of those schools. The following recommendations for research in this area are suggested:

1. While this survey collected responses from a large sample of respondents, it is important to note that all respondents were from the same relatively small geographical region. Future research should be considered in order to move the collection of data out to a larger geographical area. Data from a larger region would be a nice addition to this study and could be used in a comparative nature. It would be interesting to see if the perceptions of assistant principals on this topic are universal or localized to one region of the country.
2. This data is in addition to a principal's survey on the same topic, but it would be interesting to see data from surveys of all stakeholders within schools. Studies on the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents would also be a great addition to this compilation of data. To compare the perceptions of the leadership against the perceptions of those whom they manage may illustrate some common themes within good schools that could then be duplicated by others.
3. One interesting observation here is that Texas is currently undergoing significant changes in funding. As these adjustments are made, and should there be a shift in

the recommendation of student to assistant principal ratio along with the extra managerial responsibilities that would be inherited due to there being fewer assistant principals to manage the day to day operations of the campuses, it would be interesting to see if the perceptions of the assistant principals change as a result of the continuing evolution of the role that the assistant principal would be asked to play. Two separate studies could go forward: 1) An identical study as this one but with the new funding variables in place or; 2) an examination of the perceptions of these same respondents on similar questions but asked at a time after the new set of working responsibilities had been added to their respective roles.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Role ambiguity means that the assistant principal's roles and duties include "ill-defined, inconsistent, and at times incoherent responsibilities" (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The comprehensive nature of the roles asked of them puts the assistant principal in a position to be qualified, almost uniquely so, to render a perspective on what is good in schools and what good schools look like.

The perceptions of the assistant principals, which are derived from their beliefs, will significantly impact how they conduct the normal business of the day, and, as we have seen in the literature review, the modeling that they do during the course of completing their tasks establish the normal routines of the school which ultimately form and maintain the culture of the school (Leithwood & Louis, 2011).

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of assistant principals' perceptions of what comprises a good school, and their descriptions of school culture.

One of the interesting findings was the consistency with which the respondents described a good school and good school culture. Each research question used a categorization system for the responses and remarkably both questions generated the categories of Student Achievement, Professional Learning Communities, Positive Climate, Strong Leadership and Parental & Community Involvement. The demographic groups examined by research question one and those of research question two were the same with the exception of one group. Student Discipline was used more often by assistant principals when describing a good school whereas the idea of Valuing the Student was used when describing the culture of a good school. This demonstrates a strong correlation between the qualities of a school's culture and the quality of that school while also demonstrating a subtle difference between culture and climate, while illustrating the fact that they are intertwined.

Figure 5.5

Categories of Assistant Principals' Responses by Research Question

Characteristics of a Good School	Good School Culture
1. Student Achievement	1. Professional Learning Communities
2. Professional Learning Communities	2. Positive Climate
3. Positive Climate	3. Student Achievement
4. Strong Leadership	4. Valuing the Student
5. Parental & Community Involvement	5. Parental & Community Involvement
6. Student Discipline	6. Strong Leadership

To reinforce this concept, and by way of comparison, the categories established in this study (i.e. Student Achievement, Professional Learning Communities, Positive Climate, etc.) were very similar to those established by a similar study conducted with principals by Williams (2011). This demonstrates a consistency in the perceptions of

principals and assistant principals, which when taken together, constitute the top two tiers of leadership at most schools. This is significant in that the role of school leadership is considered second only to classroom instruction as the main variable which determines student success (Leithwood & Louis, 2011).

Interestingly, however, the one category difference between the two research questions is significant on its own merit. Research question one concentrated on the characteristics of a good school which aligns essentially with the climate of a school, and, as such, student discipline was one of the categories chosen when cataloging the data. In contrast, research question two focused on the characteristics of the culture of a good school. The one change in categories from question one was the lack of responses focused on student discipline and a higher focus on what was eventually termed "valuing the student." This represents a strong shift from the management of the climate to the establishment of the culture of a school. The significance is that it reinforces the perceptive nature of the assistant principals surveyed as well as aligns very nicely with the prevailing research, which suggests that the climate of the school results from the tangible aspects of the day to day activities while the culture is driven more by the central and core values of the organization (Deal & Peterson, 2002).

Given these findings, and when used in conjunction with previous studies, a very strong argument can be made in regards to the relationship between a school's culture and whether that school is considered "good". Both past and present literature and studies, written by and conducted by Bandura, Senge, Maslow and Dufour, suggests that for an organization to be successful it must first address the basic needs of both the individuals within the organization and the needs of the organization as a whole. This

study demonstrates, through the perceptions of assistant principals, that for a school to be considered "good," it must do so by first establishing a strong, healthy culture that is conducive to not only learning but to the well being of the whole individual, both adult and student. Once this culture is in place, it must be maintained by the school leadership, of which the assistant principal is an integral component, in order to allow the organization to flourish.

Based on these conclusions and findings several strong recommendations can be made for practitioners of education to make some positive changes to the culture and climate of schools. First, schools are missing cultural alignment. There is a gap between what has been found in research on culture and climate and what is done in schools today to build capacity towards a positive and healthy culture and climate. This research supports the recommendation that we access and pay attention to the perceptions of school assistant principals. These perceptions are readily accessible and will give school and district leaders insight into the most important level of the school, the classroom and day to day lives of the students and teachers. Building principals and school district leaders should make a concerted effort to build organizational structures and system procedures which are not only open to assistant principals but actively and overtly engage the assistant principals in the development and maintenance of the school's culture and climate.

Secondly, school districts need to develop campus specific and district-wide systems which focus resources on building and maintaining positive and healthy culture and climate. This research, along with much of the research on culture and climate,

supports this allocation of both human and material capital towards the alignment of the core values of the organization with the instructional leadership of the school.

Finally, these perceptions have significant implications for succession planning within schools and districts. Since most of the principals and district leaders begin their administrative careers as assistant principals, it is important to know and understand their perceptions. Engaging the assistant principals in the overt establishment and management of the organization's culture and climate allows supervisors valuable insights into the values, vision, work ethic, and ability to work within a structured framework of these potential future leaders within the organization.

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APPENDIX A
HUMAN SUBJECTS IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

November 17, 2011

Mr. Ted Landry
c/o Dr. Steven Busch
Dean, Education

Dear Mr. Ted Landry,

Based upon your request for exempt status, an administrative review of your research proposal entitled "The Role of School Assistant Principals and their perceptions regarding the characteristics and culture of a good school" was conducted on November 8, 2011.

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,

Anne Sherman
Director Research Compliance

*Approvals for exempt protocols will be valid for 5 years beyond the approval date. Approval for this project will expire **October 1, 2016**. 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: 12107-EX

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577
COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

APPENDIX B
THE PRINCIPAL SURVEY

Create School as Community
Through Reflective Practice

University of Houston College of Education
COLLABORATION
FOR LEARNING & LEADING

Graduate Student's Name

Section A:

Demographic Information

The Principal's name

Age in Years: ☐ 30 and Under ☐ 31-37 ☐ 38-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐ 56-62 ☐ Over 63

Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female Years as a Principal Years in Education

Degrees Held: ☐ Bachelors ☐ Masters ☐ Doctorate

Management Certification Year

Institution

Ethnicity: ☐ White/Non-Hispanic ☐ Black/Non-Hispanic ☐ Hispanic ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander

☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Non-Resident/International

Major teaching field

Extra-curricular activities directed while a teacher

The School's name

Location: ☐ Rural ☐ Suburban ☐ Urban The Grades in the school

Number of: Teachers Students

Percentage of students: White/Non-Hispanic Black/Non-Hispanic Hispanic
Asian/Pacific Islander American Indian/Alaskan Native
Non-Resident/International

Other certificated personnel Non-certificated personnel

TAKS Rating: ☐ Exemplary ☐ Recognized ☐ Acceptable ☐ Low performing

Percentage of students receiving free and reduced Lunch

Name of School District

Section B:

In this section we are trying to establish how principals conceptualize their notions of what makes a school a "good" school as opposed to a "fair or poor" school.

Much of the current educational leadership literature focuses on effective schools and more currently how we develop our schools as community. The new nomenclature currently used is "good school." How would you describe a good school?

For our purposes school culture is described as "What the school values." How would you describe the culture of a good school?

Section C

We are trying to understand the importance of the relationship between the principal and the teachers.

Explain how the relationship between the principal and the teacher important for the school.

Describe what you think are the most critical feature for a successful working relationship between teacher and principal.

What do you do to create good relations with your teachers?

Do you look out for the personal welfare of your teachers? If so, how do you do it?

Section D

In this section we are trying to establish the attitudes beliefs and values that principals have with regard to teacher supervision.

What is the purpose of teacher supervision?

Do our assessment practices (TTAS, PDAS) really work? Do you believe that the process achieves the intended outcome? What do you believe are the outcomes?

Do you think that the principal is the best person in the school to do supervision? For example is there any value for a principal with no education or experience supervising a French language class.

When supervising teachers do you report on what you observe or do you consider other factors when writing your reports? Explain

Section E

We are trying to establish the understandings that principals have about leadership

Describe he difference between a "linear" leader contrasted to a critical thinker and systematic problem solver?

What do you believe are the most important characteristics of a good leader?

How would you describe yourself as a leader?

To what extent do you allow teachers to take risks to make the school better?

To what extent do you believe that teachers should be involved in leadership roles in your school?

Section F

We are trying to establish the understanding and value principals attach to the role of parental involvement in their student's education.

What do you believe is an appropriate and necessary level of parental involvement in the student's education? Explain.

What do you do to encourage and support parental involvement in their student's education?

When a parent asks you to change their student's teacher how do you react? Check one category below

☐	I do so willingly
☐	I do so hesitatingly
☐	I do so begrudgingly
☐	I try my best to discourage it
☐	I resist their efforts to have a change

Explain your answer here:

Section G

In this section we are trying to establish the obstacles frustrations and changes principals are most concerned with

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most and 1 being least, rate the degree to which each of the following presents a feeling of frustration or being discouraged in being able to carry out your duties.

	1	2	3	4	5
Federal Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
State Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School District Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Money	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of other resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parent involvement in the school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor Preparation of Teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Teacher Commitment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor instruction of teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parental involvement at home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Student Motivation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor basic skills of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most and 1 being least rate the degree to which each of the following presents a genuine obstacle or restriction that cause you the most concern as you try to carry out your duties as principal.

	1	2	3	4	5
Federal Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
State Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School District Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Money	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of other resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parent involvement in the school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor Preparation of Teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Teacher Commitment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor instruction of teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parental involvement at home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Student Motivation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor basic skills of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most and 1 being least rate the following for the things that you would change to make you more enabled in your role as principal.

	1	2	3	4	5
Federal Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
State Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School District Bureaucracy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Money	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of other resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parent involvement in the school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor Preparation of Teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Teacher Commitment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor instruction of teachers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parental involvement at home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of Student Motivation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Poor basic skills of students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section H

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most and 1 being least indicate the extent to which each of the following represents important knowledge you should have to be a successful principal.

	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Curriculum	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Law	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fiscal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most and 1 being least indicate the extent to which each of the following represents important skills you should have to be a successful principal.

	1	2	3	4	5
Interpersonal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technical	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most and 1 being least indicate the extent to which each of the following represents important attributes you should have to be a successful principal.

	1	2	3	4	5
Positive disposition	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Visionary	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ethical Values	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Good Communicator	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organizer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section I

We are trying to understand the importance of student behavior in the operation of the school

To what degree is student discipline an important aspect of a good school?

Explain

Do you know of teachers who rarely have student discipline problems?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what is it that those teachers do that results in good student discipline.

Describe what it is that teachers' do that have poor student discipline.

Do you see a relationship between a teachers' classroom discipline and students' academic achievement?

Do you think that schools should teach "virtues" or "character?" Why or why not? Do you have any formal programs in your school that focus on character education?

Section J

There is probably a lot of advice you could give to someone preparing to become a school principal but if there was one single piece of advice you could give what would advise.

Section K

How has the influence of high-stakes testing influenced your role as a principal? How is it influenced teachers, parents, and students?

Section L

To what extent is the achievement gap a problem in your school? What efforts have you made to reduce achievement differences in school?

Section M

To what extent has technology make a difference in your school? How has it influenced teachers, counselors, and students? How has it influenced your role as principal?

Section N

Can you think of an example of research-generated knowledge which you found useful in some aspect of your job as principal? If so please tell me about that knowledge.

All educators need access to new expert knowledge. What sources of information do you find most useful when looking for new professional ideas? On a scale of 1 to 10 (highest), how would you rate each of these types of information sources for the technical knowledge they provide:

a. Professional meetings of state or national education associations

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

b. Workshops

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

c. Professional Journals concerned with education

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

d. Professional Books concerned with education

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

e. Professional Bulletins from regional or national information sources

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

f. Professional Bulletins from district or state authorities

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

g. Newsletters from professional organizations

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

h. University or college courses that you attended for certification or a advanced degree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

i. Internet

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

j. Other sources (please explain)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

On a scale of 1 to 10 (highest), how would you rate the quality of the educational research that you've read over the last year?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would it take for you to rate it a 10?