

## Principal Influence: A Catalyst for Positive School Climate

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### Abstract

This investigation explores the relationships between principal influence and four facets of organizational climate: institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior. Data were collected from 2,033 teachers at 112 elementary schools in two states from the Southern and Midwestern United States. The results of multiple linear regression analyses show that the independent variables of principal influence, SES, and school size combined to form a significant portion of the variance in organizational climate. The four facets of organizational climate explored in this study provide insight into specific mechanisms through which influential principals can positively affect schools.

**Keywords** School climate; Leadership; Principals; Influence

### Introduction

Schools possess dynamic social environments that present numerous challenges for campus leaders. To meet these challenges, effective principals work with a variety of school stakeholders on the campus to optimize all facets of the organization. Whether principals are encouraging students to increase their levels of academic achievement, engaging the instructional needs of the faculty, or addressing important

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organizational issues, the abilities of school leaders to influence their constituencies looms large. To be sure, principals who possess high levels of influence with campus stakeholders are perceived as both trustworthy and dedicated to doing what is best for the school (Hollingsworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018). Such influential principals are persuasive, lead by example, and distribute leadership collectively among school stakeholders (Ni, Yan, & Pounder, 2018). While principals all possess their own leadership styles, it is certainly true that they can benefit from a better understanding of how their influence can serve as an important catalyst in advancing effective academic and social campus endeavors.

## Theoretical Foundation

Principals routinely confront organizational demands from both internal and external forces (Fiore, 2016). At times, these challenges may seem insurmountable in light of rapidly escalating calls for systemic change. Indeed, the call for both greater accountability and increased student achievement pose formidable tests for principals (Collet, 2017). In addition to resolving such matters, principals are ultimately responsible for sustaining healthy campus climates. In fact, the literature points to the saliency of a positive climate as a critical component of a well-functioning school (Smith, 2002; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014; Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, & Young, 2011; Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010; Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010).

A positive campus climate reinforces productive organizational behaviors and encourages higher levels of student performance (Lynch, Lerner, & Leventhal, 2013; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Climate factors also shape the system's capacity to adapt to both sudden and abrupt change mandates often thrust on schools (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013), and a growing body of research illustrates the importance of examining specific climate factors that impact them (Cornelius-White, 2007; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; John & Taylor, 2014).

Principals who influence their school constituents (including teachers, students, and staff members) in positive ways also advance momentum toward achieving organizational goals. In addition, educational institutions where persuasive leaders take beneficial actions on behalf of the organization experience more unified stakeholder buy-in and fluid operations (Kearney & Smith, 2010). In such environments, principal-led directionality is evident and problems are addressed promptly and effectively by the majority of stakeholders. Most certainly, the influence of the principal and school climate represent two salient school commodities (Kearney & Smith, 2009).

## Review of the Literature

### ***Organizational Climate: The Catalyst***

Early investigations of climate targeted both industrial and business organizations, and eventually extended to educational institutions (Gorton & Alston, 2018). In his seminal investigation of the banking industry, Chris Argyris (1958) used a case study approach to analyze interpersonal relations. Through his research, he discovered em-

bedded organizational properties that significantly influence factors such as employee turnover, staff morale, and productivity. Spurred on by Argyris's initial investigation of organizational climate, other scholars pursued the concept at the institutional level and paved the way for research specifically targeting schools (Getzels & Thelen, 1960; Goodlad, 1955; Halpin & Croft, 1963; Litwin & Stringer, 1968).

### **School Climate**

Wayne K. Hoy (1990) provides a clear and precise definition of school climate. He indicates that:

Put simply, the organizational climate of a school is the set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behavior of its members. In more specific terms: school climate is the relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools. (p. 152)

Hence, the impact of an organization's climate on the work lives of institutional stakeholders is of particular interest in the field of education, as the implications span many areas, including job attitudes, organizational citizenship behaviors, ethics, safety, innovation, individual and team performance, and trust (Qin, Huang, Hu, Schminke, & Ju, 2018). Likewise, the ability of a campus principal to positively influence these areas is also important, as principals routinely assist in shaping the organizational climate of the school.

In 2003, Wayne Hoy, Page Smith and Scott Sweetland furthered the empirical study of school climate by conceptualizing a highly integrated approach to the analysis of the social aspects of educational institutions. Drawing from specific dimensions of climate unearthed by Wayne Hoy and Dennis Sabo (1998), they developed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI). The OCI introduces a more integrated approach to the analysis of the social environments of schools by combining two critical frameworks of organizational climate consistently found in the literature: openness and health. The OCI measures four important aspects of the organization including: 1) institutional vulnerability (which reflects the extent to which the school is susceptible to outside forces emanating from parents and special interest groups); 2) collegial leadership (which reflects principal leadership behavior with regard to meeting the social needs of the faculty and reaching school goals); 3) professional teacher behavior (which denotes teacher behavior toward colleagues and students); and 4) achievement press (which describes a campus where parents, teachers, and students value learning and exert pressure to possess and maintain high academic standards and continual school improvement) (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2003). The current investigation furthers this work by utilizing the theoretical underpinnings of the OCI.

### **Influence: A Key**

Early research in leader influence identified individual psychosomatic processes that are prone to a variety of social stimuli. However, these initial studies did not differentiate among the various types of influences but instead took a reductionist view

that classified all provocations as group affects (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Although important, these seminal investigations failed to determine if group influences were the direct cause of a person making a particular choice, or if it was an individual's response to some type of persuasive action by someone in a leadership or supervisory capacity.

The concept of influence is often coupled with factors such as the ability to achieve compliance and gain leverage through the techniques of persuasion (Kearney & Smith, 2009). Recent research points to the fact that those in authority wield "persuasive" behaviors that influence organizational stakeholders and affect institutional change (Kearney & Smith, 2008; Kearney, Smith & Maika, 2014; Jackson & Marriott, 2012). Notwithstanding, Rod Ogowa and Steven Bossert (1995) assert that influence is not exclusively limited to those in formal leadership roles within an organization, but rather that all stakeholders have both the potential and ability to influence the decisions of others within the institution.

Certain influential precepts, however small or insignificant they may appear, further provide leaders with useful insights into the collective behaviors and social rituals comprising institutional life. To that end, the examination of these phenomena is rooted in an emerging body of scholarship, which is being applied in social situations, business settings, and educational venues (Smith & Hoy, 2007; Cialdini, 2009).

Specifically, Robert Cialdini's (2009) work identifies a number of factors that cause one person to positively commit to another person or to specific organizational prerogatives. His investigation of persuasion rests on six key principles of influence including 1) liking (people like people who are like them, people who like them); 2) reciprocity (people repay in kind); 3) commitment and consistency (people fulfill written, public, and voluntary commitments); 4) social proof (people follow the lead of similar people); 5) authority (people defer to experts who provide shortcuts to decisions requiring specialized information); and 6) scarcity (people value what is scarce) (Cialdini, 2009).

Subsequent research by Page Smith and Wayne Hoy (2007) further refined Cialdini's six principles of persuasion by adding four additional tenets: 7) trust (people follow those whom they trust); 8) fairness (individuals in organizations crave fair treatment and correcting incidents of institutional inequity produces leader influence); 9) self-efficacy (confident individuals usually demonstrate successful abilities. Leaders with high levels of self-efficacy influence others and are prone to be effective in that endeavor); and 10) optimism (it enhances success and provides followers with a "can do" attitude). These 10 principles, which also form the basis of this investigation, offer an entry point to understanding the use of influence as a means of orchestrating successful school leadership (Smith & Hoy, 2007).

### ***Influence: Leadership***

The early work of James Burns (1978) links the exercise of influence to leadership. Burns defines leadership as "leaders inducting followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations — the wants and needs, the aspiration and expectations — of both leaders and followers" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Karen Jackson and Christine Marriott (2012) point out that leadership is grounded on the

relationship between people, leaders, and followers. From this, leaders utilize a certain degree of influence to step forward and lead over those who choose to follow. Jonathan Eckert (2019) examines distributed leadership practices, and he asserts that principals who invest in collective leadership development not only have high levels of teacher support but also attain high levels of student outcomes. It is important to note that Eckert is not merely advocating for a distribution of labor or the delegation of duties, but rather he is examining principals' efforts to develop future leaders by providing opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

According to Woonki Hong, Lu Zhang, Kwangwook Gang, and Boreum Choi (2019), influence is dependent on the actors who exert it; and its outcomes are central to leadership as an organizational quality. In general, those organizational members who have information or skills that are needed by others in order to perform their duties and organizational roles are deemed influential.

### ***Influence in Schools***

Schools represent important institutions that do not deal exclusively with educating students. Educational entities are charged with an escalating array of additional duties, including societal socialization processes, incorporating health awareness initiatives, guaranteeing safe spaces for all students, and adopting the normative imperatives of the local community (Chapman, 2007). Aside from forwarding basic education for all students, schools now are expected to expertly manage the social and emotional needs of students (Frazier, Mehta, Atkins, Glisson, Green, Gibbons, Kim, Chapman, Ogle, Schoenwald, Cua, & Ogle, 2015). This requires both high levels of flexibility and fluid institutional structures capable of shifting suddenly to meet current educational needs. Coupled with an increased accountability press, it is also imperative for schools to negotiate possible turmoil stemming from disruptions in the campus social milieu. Thus, the well-being of students may depend on highly functional campus leaders possessing the abilities to influence constituencies both inside and beyond school walls.

As bureaucratic mandates for schools become more focused and school stakeholders are pressed to ensure productive changes, greater accountability expectations are being attached to reform initiatives under the guise of "standards" (Harlow, Weber, Koch, & Hendricks, 2018). These emerging legislative dictates also necessitate that administrators enhance their abilities to influence students, parents, and teachers toward greater student achievement.

However, while many teachers willingly embrace change, others are reluctant to incorporate actions necessary to improve student achievement. Yet regulatory policies increasingly reward and punish schools based on student achievement (Adams, Forsyth, Ware, & Mwavita, 2016). Given this reality, influential principals who are capable of creating campus climates that reinforce student success have become indispensable (Palmer, 2016). This places an ever-increasing focus on the abilities of school principals to adjust behaviors and improve performance levels through their powers of influence. In short, communities are turning to principals to institute changes necessary to accommodate desired educational shifts and the ability of the principal to positively influence the process is critical (Brown, 2007; Muijs & Harris, 2007).

### ***The Role of the Influential Principal***

The principal sets the tone for learning and establishes both the social and intellectual contexts of the campus (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Thus, it is quite common for principals to develop capacities to influence the school stakeholders in strategic ways that move the campus forward. Indeed, savvy principals exert positive influence in various ways, such as mentoring, modeling acceptable behaviors, visioning, and enabling (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

The literature identifies strong relationships between the ability of principals to influence campus stakeholders and positive school climates (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003; Roney, Coleman, & Schlichting, 2007; Smith, Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Walker & Slear, 2011). In mentioning the need of schools to foster high-level cooperative interaction, Robert Quinn (2012) describes an effective team as having the following characteristics: understanding one another's roles, participating in a common activity, working cohesively in trusting relationships, exercising personal discipline, and making individual sacrifices for the good of the team. This implies that influential principals who elicit such behaviors in subordinates possess the abilities to forge highly efficient and cohesive collegial learning environments (Adams, Olsen, & Ware, 2017).

In sum, many school leaders strive to promote school climates wherein all students can succeed both personally and academically. In attempting to nurture affecting learning environments, mindful principals are keenly aware of the potential changes they create via the use of positive influence and the resulting effects on the organizational climate of the school. Thus, the investigation of both principal influence and school climate provide fertile ground for school leaders dedicated to improving their campuses.

### ***Research Question and Hypotheses***

This investigation explores the relationships between four salient aspects of organizational climate and the influence of the principal as expressed in elementary schools. Thus, the simple hypothesis of this study is that principal influence is positively related to school climate. However, school climate is viewed from a multidimensional perspective, and thus the central research question is: "Are the dimensions of organizational climate predicted by the influence of the principal?" The following empirical hypotheses delineate this question more specifically.

*Hypothesis 1:* Principal influence, students' socioeconomic status, and school size will combine to provide a significant set of predictors of institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior.

*Hypothesis 2:* Principal influence will emerge as the best predictor of institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior.

### **Methods**

In this investigation, descriptive and correlational analyses are employed to test the

simple hypothesis that principal influence is positively related to a school's organizational climate. In addition, multiple regression analyses are employed to test the empirical hypotheses of the study and provide a more refined picture of the effects of principal influence on four aspects of organizational climate. The unit of analysis is the school.

### **Sample**

Data were drawn from a sample of 112 elementary schools from 10 independent school districts in the Southern and Midwestern United States. Schools were selected by means of convenience sampling. Although the selection of schools was not random, the participating campuses were representative of urban, suburban, and rural schools, as defined by the Locale Codes of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2019). To be considered for the study, campuses had to have 25 or more faculty members.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from the faculty of each school at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting. A trained researcher controlled the location, time, and circumstances in which the surveys were administered to the teachers. Surveys were administered to faculty groups at meetings held either before or after school, or at a predetermined date at a professional development meeting. Prior to the researcher distributing the surveys, the building administrator introduced the researcher. The researcher then read a statement describing the purpose of the study and emphasized that faculty members did not have to respond to any items that made them feel uncomfortable or that they found confusing. Teachers were instructed to not include their names on the questionnaires in order to maintain anonymity. The survey participants were also assured that the data would be kept confidential, would only be employed to evaluate the general characteristics of the school, and would in no way affect teacher evaluations. Within these 112 elementary schools, there were 3,834 individuals employed as faculty. Out of this group, 2,033 individuals completed this survey, for an individual participation rate of 53 percent.

### **Operational Measures**

Stemming from the seminal work of Cialdini (2003), Smith & Hoy (2007) developed the Persuasion Index (PI), an instrument designed to measure 10 specific aspects of principal influence as perceived by the faculty of the school. Previous analyses of the measure have consistently produced high alpha coefficients, and this was true in the current investigation. Construct validity of the PI scale is supported by the work of Smith & Hoy (2007). Participants in the study responded to the PI utilizing a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree (1)" to "strongly agree (6)." In the current sample, the reliability coefficient of the PI is .88.

To evaluate the climate of the school, Hoy, Smith and Sweetland (2003) developed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI). The 27-item instrument provides researchers with a valid and reliable examination of organizational climate as measured by four distinct dimensions (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2003). Previous research sup-

ports the construct validity of the OCI and the factor analytic structure of the instrument is also consistent across samples. Teachers identify their perceptions along a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The reliability coefficients for the OCI in this study range from .86 to .96.

### **Socioeconomic Status and School Size: An Important Caveat**

Socioeconomic status (SES) has consistently been shown to be a pervasive influence in the scholarly investigations of schools. Accordingly, the deleterious influences of low SES on both schools and schooling are well documented (Langenkamp & Carbonaro, 2018). Conversely, schools located in high SES communities have traditionally demonstrated high levels of student achievement on standardized tests (Chmielewski, 2019).

School size has also been shown to have an impact on both campus climate and student achievement (Giambona & Porcu, 2018). For example, Anna Egalite and Brian Kisida (2016) conducted a study of over one million students in four American states and found that students’ math and reading achievement scores declined as school size increased. Accordingly, these important demographic variables are included in the analyses to provide a more comprehensive and refined view of the possible relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

## **Results**

### **Correlational Analysis**

After a brief review of the descriptive statistics of the investigation, which produced no anomalies that prevented further statistical progression, correlational analyses were employed. It was predicted that the four factors of organizational climate (collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, achievement press, and institutional vulnerability) would be related to principal influence, SES, and school size. Individual elements of organizational climate were indeed correlated with the variables of principal influence, SES, and school size; however, there were some exceptions.

**Table 1: Correlational analysis of the study variables (N = 112)**

	Principal influence	Collegial leadership	Professional teacher behavior	Achievement press	Institutional vulnerability	SES	Size
Principal influence	—	.968**	.573**	.585**	-.219**	-.311**	.093
Collegial leadership	—	—	.558**	.561**	-.269**	-.264**	.053
Professional teacher behavior	—	—	—	.711**	-.078	-.428**	.088
Achievement press	—	—	—	—	.192*	-.586**	.202*
Institutional vulnerability	—	—	—	—	—	-.371**	.190*
SES	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.370**
School size	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes: \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



Collegial leadership was statistically and significantly related to principal influence ( $r = .968, p < .01$ ), SES ( $r = -.264, p < .01$ ), professional teacher behavior ( $r = -.558, p < .01$ ), achievement press ( $r = .561, p < .01$ ), and institutional vulnerability ( $r = -.269, p < .01$ ), whereas professional teacher behavior was statistically and significantly related to principal influence ( $r = .573, p < .01$ ), SES ( $r = -.428, p < .01$ ), and achievement press ( $r = .711, p < .01$ ). In addition, achievement press was statistically and significantly related to principal influence ( $r = .585, p < .01$ ), school size ( $r = .202, p < .05$ ), SES ( $r = -.586, p < .01$ ), and institutional vulnerability ( $r = .192, p < .05$ ). Institutional vulnerability was also statistically and significantly related to school size ( $r = .190, p < .05$ ), SES ( $r = -.371, p < .01$ ), and principal influence ( $r = -.219, p < .05$ ). SES was statistically and significantly related to school size ( $r = -.370, p < .05$ ). Finally, principal influence was statistically and significantly related to SES ( $r = -.311, p < .05$ ). The results of the correlational analysis are shown in Table 1.

### **Multiple Regression Analysis: Testing the Hypotheses**

The dimensions of organizational climate were each regressed individually on principal influence. Principal influence, SES, and school size were entered into the regression calculation using the simultaneous entry method. First, principal influence and the demographic variables of school size and SES were found to form a linear combination explaining a statistically significant portion of the variance of collegial leadership ( $R = .969, p < .01$ , with an adjusted  $R$  square of .937); simply stated, the combination of the independent variables in the regression explained 93.7 percent of the variance in collegial leadership, thus confirming the first part of hypothesis one.

Next, professional teacher behavior was regressed against principal influence and the demographic variables of school size and SES ( $R = .633, p < .01$ , with an adjusted  $R$  square of .384). A linear combination of principal influence, school size, and SES accounted for 38.4 percent of the variance of professional teacher behavior. Thus, confirming the second part of hypothesis one.

Likewise, the third dependent variable, achievement press, was regressed on the three independent variables of principal influence, school size, and SES ( $R = .723, p < .01$ , with an adjusted  $R$  square of .509). This linear combination accounted for 51 percent of the variance in achievement press, thus confirming the third part of hypothesis one.

The final analysis regressed institutional vulnerability on the independent variables of principal influence, school size, and SES, ( $R = .513, p < .01$ , with an adjusted  $R$  square of .243). Thus, principal influence and the demographic variables of SES and school size were found to form a linear combination explaining 24.3 percent of the variance in institutional vulnerability.

Hypothesis two stated that principal influence would emerge as the best predictor of institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, achievement press, and professional teacher behavior. However, that was not entirely the case. An analysis of the data indicated that while principal influence (when regressed against institutional vulnerability) did make a statistically significant independent contribution to the variance ( $\beta = -.368, p < .001$ ), SES proved to be the largest contributor to that variance

( $\beta = -.467, p < .001$ ). Similarly, principal influence (when regressed against achievement press) also made a statistically significant independent contribution to the variance ( $\beta = .446, p < .001$ ), but it was again the second largest contributor to that variance, behind SES ( $\beta = -.449, p < .001$ ). An examination of the remaining two regressions demonstrated that principal influence was indeed the single largest statistically significant individual contributor when regressed against professional teacher behavior ( $\beta = .485, p < .001$ ) and collegial leadership ( $\beta = .980, p < .001$ ) respectively, thus confirming those two parts of hypothesis two. Although hypothesis two was not confirmed in its entirety, because principal influence made statistically significant independent contributions to the variance in all four dependent variables, it can be stated with a high degree of confidence that overall, principal influence has a substantial predictive effect on the four elements of organizational climate analyzed in the present study. The results of the multiple regression analyses are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Multiple regression of collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, achievement press, and institutional vulnerability**

Standard coefficients (beta)	Collegial leadership		Professional teacher behavior		Achievement press		Institutional vulnerability	
	r	beta	r	beta	r	beta	r	beta
Principal influence	.968**	.980**	.573**	.485**	.585**	.446**	-.219*	-.368**
SES	-.264**	.030	-.428**	.303**	-.586**	-.449**	-.371**	-.467**
School size	.053	-.027	.088	-.069	.202*	-.006	.190*	.051

Notes: \*\*Significant at the 0.01 level. \*Significant at the 0.05 level

## Discussion

This research targeted principal influence and how four aspects of organizational climate intersect to improve the learning environments of schools. Buttressed by both business and educational climate research, it seems reasonable that schools with positive climates also have principals who are uniquely influential in connecting collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, achievement press, and institutional vulnerability to the social milieus of their campuses, and in this investigation that was indeed the case.

As this investigation suggests, the power of persuasion yielded by a principal does affect the overall climate of the school. In light of these results, the discussion now shifts to some possible reasons why school principals should pursue influence and how the findings relate to four specific aspects of campus climate.

### **Principal Influence and Institutional Vulnerability**

Institutional vulnerability refers to the extent to which the school system is predisposed to pressure from vocal parents and active citizen groups. Schools exhibiting low levels of institutional vulnerability evidence open and healthy climates that possess teachers with high levels of *esprit de corps*. In schools where principals insulate the faculty from high-demand parents and intrusive external forces, teachers are fo-

cused on instruction and concentrate on student achievement. In addition, schools evidencing low levels of institutional vulnerability depend on influential principals to both ensure stability in the face of opposition and cultivate public support for the staff in the community. In such schools, the principal is confident, influences by example, and is open, authentic, and approachable. In turn, these traits add credibility, which furthers principal influence and enhances his or her ability to promote a positive climate on the campus.

The findings from this research also indicate that while principal influence made a statistically significant independent contribution to the variance in institutional vulnerability, SES also emerged as a statistically significant contributor. Accordingly, this implies that persuasive principals who employ the principles of influence can motivate teachers to meet the challenges of working with students in economically disadvantaged environments. For example, principals who utilize Cialdini's (2001) principle of social proof when confronting politically or economically volatile issues in communities where parents often "storm the gates" stand a good chance of negotiating successful outcomes. To that end, influential principals who model behaviors that encourage stakeholders in positive rather than negative directions set the organizational tone by establishing both the social and intellectual contexts of the campus (Muijs & Harris, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Put simply, persuasive principals who generate (and model) the positive behaviors desired of the school stakeholders and members of the community, increase the chances that others will follow their lead.

### ***Principal Influence and Collegial Leadership***

Collegial leadership reflects the principal's willingness to meet the needs of the faculty and assist them in accomplishing commonly established school goals (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2003). In such schools, the principal balances the articulation of clear teacher expectations and performance standards while exhibiting behaviors teachers view as helping them achieve a common goal. Moreover, campuses with influential principals who lead collegially benefit from high degrees of openness and mutual engagement, and stakeholders feel a sense of responsibility, respect, and trust toward both the principal and each other (Adams, Olsen, & Ware, 2017).

Influential principals who are also collegial focus on providing faculty support in authentic and honest ways. It is likely that a principal's consideration of the teachers' interests represents a critical area of influence and aligns with the principles of both liking and fairness. To that end, principals who are viewed as influential by teachers are likely to have established credibility with them through acts of reciprocity and demonstrated empathy. In essence, the principal "plays on the same team" as the teachers and considers them to be critical co-workers. The principal is collegial and strives to consistently do his or her best for all the teachers.

### ***Principal Influence and Professional Teacher Behavior***

Professional teacher behavior characterizes a teacher's actions toward colleagues and students (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2003). The professional conduct of teachers is reflected by the manner in which they interact with both school and community stakeholders, it is, in large part, dependent upon relationships with other employees,

the personalities of participants, and the leadership of the organization (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991).

Savvy principals realize that positive interactions among the staff, students, and administration are fundamental to establishing positive campus climates. This includes stakeholders' perceptions about the behavioral norms that edify the organization. For example, how a grade-level team or a specific group of departmental teachers interact and communicate with parents often conveys a "public" message representative of the entire campus to community stakeholders. Most certainly, inappropriate or unprofessional teacher behavior evidenced in the community reflects negatively on the entire organization. Thus, influential principals are diligent in their attempts at setting examples of desired behaviors for the teachers. Such actions communicate clear expectations for community interactions by the faculty and the professional standards in the school.

In addition, principals who direct desired professional behaviors to the faculty members can utilize the principle of reciprocity to influence the teachers by establishing a sense of behavioral obligation to repay in kind what has been extended to them. Accordingly, the norm of reciprocity represents a shared pattern of exchange coupled with a belief that people should help those who have helped them (Anderson, 2004). Thus, the principal's capacity to influence increases when the teachers realize the principal has the capability to affect the quality of outcomes attained by them and is dedicated to doing so. Hence, by virtue of principals occupying highly visible and influential positions in the school, they possess prominent positions in the social equation and have frequent opportunities to cultivate professional teacher behavior on their campuses through both positional authority and personal examples (Kearney & Smith, 2010).

### ***Principal Influence and Achievement Press***

Finally, when both the school and community prioritize student learning, the push to maintain high academic standards, or *achievement press*, manifests (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Principals interested in improving the academic milieu of their schools can utilize influential principles to engage the teachers in forwarding high levels of achievement press (Harlow, Weber, Koch, & Hendricks, 2018). For example, principals seeking to engage the faculty in a press for greater levels of achievement can employ the principle of consistency by making the adoption of campus academic goals a priority and regularly garnering "public" support for them from faculty members in teacher meetings. Likewise, school forums involving community members, such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA) gatherings and school board meetings, offer additional opportunities to glean external "public" support for increasing the school's focus on student achievement. These actions, coupled with repeated iterations of trust-building behaviors dedicated to deepening faculty awareness of academic goals and increasing achievement press, provide engaging and persuasive principals with potent ways to enlist both internal and external constituencies to help "close the deal."

Influential principals also can engage the principle of self-efficacy among institutional stakeholders to put forth increased levels of achievement press. They reinforce the belief that school stakeholders can make a difference and demonstrate a "contagious and confident" self. In essence, they prove effective in their endeavors. As a result,

this type of influence generates positive attitudes and can be self-fulfilling to other school stakeholders (Smith & Hoy, 2007). As Albert Bandura (1977) notes, individuals have the capacity to change their own thinking and self-efficacy beliefs, thus allowing people to revise and control the physiological states affecting them. Principals schooled in the principles of influence realize that individuals live within the environments they create for themselves, and thus they have the ability to change the factors that influence their thoughts and actions. They also know that techniques designed to enhance the self-efficacy of important school constituents can dramatically affect the institutional emphasis directed at increasing student achievement. Thus, principals consistently delivering encouraging, persuasive, and efficacious messages influence motivation and provide opportunities to affect the self-efficacy and achievement of others.

### **Limitations**

This research represents a beginning and seeks to further supplement the literature on leader characteristics and school properties that affect campus stakeholders in productive ways. Similar to any such study, there are limitations. For example, this study only examined schools in two states. It would be interesting to examine whether the findings would be similar in other regions of the United States or internationally. Further, the study is limited in its scope as it examines elementary schools only. Additionally, this study focused on the impact of principal influence on four unique aspects of campus climate. The principal is but one cog within education as a whole. This study did not seek to examine the impact that broader educational systems may have on the campus. There are of course many other axles, flywheels, and bearings that are required to keep schools functioning as well-oiled machines, including superintendents, board members, policymakers, et cetera.

### **Conclusion**

Schools represent dynamic and changing environments. In such atmospheres, tensions often surface and learning is challenged. Principals also are subject to myriad situations that affect the education of students. As schools become more diverse and attempts to equitably educate all students intensify, campus principals emerge as critical catalysts in manufacturing the proper educational climate to promote both effective teaching and student learning.

Most assuredly, the need for greater levels of principal influence surfaces as the complexity of public education increases and school stakeholders look to the administrative leader to impact both internal and external constituencies. Specifically, research demonstrates that school climate can either supplement or detract from effective schooling (Mitchell, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2010). Thus, in concert with principal influence, school climate factors such as institutional vulnerability, collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, and achievement press weigh heavily into the effective schools equation. In fact, principal preparation programs that promote how to develop positive organizational climates in schools and facilitate leader influence in authentic and ethical ways can further propel the current press for educational excellence forward. Truly, the presence or absence of these salient social characteristics, coupled with principals trained to utilize them, may prove vital to administrative prerogatives.

Effective schooling is critical in forwarding the academic and social success of students. To that end, principals represent important cogs in promoting high levels of student achievement and improving schools. Indeed, it is the principal who is charged with the responsibility to make necessary campus changes, provide the instructional vision for the school, and initiate the proper structures for student success. Poised as critical facilitators, principals who hone their abilities to both influence campus stakeholders and cultivate positive organizational climates emerge as important catalysts for achieving school success.

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