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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CULTURE AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CULTURE AND STUDENT

ACHIEVEMENT IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Susan Lynn Smith

A Dissertation
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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CULTURE AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by Susan Lynn Smith

August 2007

The major focus of the American reform and restructuring movement of public education is improved student learning. The primary goal has been to increase student achievement. Although the debate continues as to what constitutes an effective school, most models list an effective school culture as key. This study examines the relationship between student achievement, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and school culture, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and principal's years in the building while controlling for the socioeconomic level.

The SCS provides insight toward the collaborative nature of school cultures in regards to the following factors: Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership (Gruenert, 1998).

The ARMT measures student proficiency of the content standards in the Alabama Course of Study in reading and mathematics. The ARMT scores are used for AYP.

The analysis for this study was based on the school culture characteristics that relate to student achievement on the ARMT in reading and mathematics. The six factors of the SCS were used as independent variables, and the student achievement scores of the ARMT in reading and mathematics were used as
dependent variables. Multiple linear regressions using SPSS were used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.

The results of the regression analysis suggests that SES, with a negative linear relationship, accounts for a significant amount of reading and math proficiency variability, indicating that students with lower SES status are less likely to do well in reading and math. However, some variance in reading and math proficiency can be attributed to the six SCS factors and years in the building.
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CHAPTER I
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CULTURE AND STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Background

In the Indian fable, *Seven Blind Mice*, each blind mouse unknowingly examines different parts of an elephant to describe its characteristics and determine its identity. The seventh mouse is the only one to investigate the whole to discern that it is an elephant (Young, 1992). Like the elephant examined by the mice, schools are dynamic organizations, each with a "feel" of its own. This "feel" is the school's culture, or its personality, and it consists of multiple dimensions that define the very essence of the school. Each dimension is unique and critical, and necessary to the overall feel of the elephant, or of the whole school culture.

Deal (1993) defines school culture as the "deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of a school's history" (p. 83). "The heart and soul of school culture is what people believe, the assumptions they make about how school works." (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 47). School culture is evident in the commonly held beliefs of teachers, students and principals (Heckman, 1993). An effective school culture goes beyond creating an efficient learning environment and focuses on the core values necessary to teach and influence students.

At the center of focus in schools across the United States today is student achievement. The past several decades have produced a great variety of efforts to raise the academic achievement of students. The Russian's launch of Sputnik
in 1957 caused America to begin questioning the quality of schools in America. As a result, funding to the National Science Foundation was increased to support the teaching of a better science and mathematics curriculum (Finley, 2000).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and again called for school reform. This report claimed, "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (Finley, 2000, p. 5).

The 1995-96 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provided evidence that the nation still had not yet reached its goal of being first in the world in mathematics and science achievement. The TIMSS achievement data supported the push of the standards movement into the accountability phase, therefore, continuing to increase efforts to improve schools (Finley, 2000).

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act into law as a result of a shift in educational thought and practice. The NCLB Act contains the President's four basic education reform principles: a) stronger accountability for results; b) increased flexibility and local control; c) expanded options for parents, and d) an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (Finley, 2000).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act resulted in increased involvement in education by the Federal Government. Intense monitoring of student achievement has required a number of changes in the education practices and assessment systems of many states (Heck, 2006). Increasing student
achievement will remain critical as schools continue to raise test scores and close achievement gaps.

Effective schools have been defined as institutions that display: a) a clear school mission; b) effective instructional leadership and practices; c) high expectations; d) a safe, orderly, and positive environment; e) maximum use of instructional time; f) frequent monitoring of student progress; and g) positive home-school relationships (Finley, 2000).

A school's culture is the key factor in determining whether school improvement is possible (Deal & Peterson, 1998). The importance of a school's culture in educational reform is evident in research related to school improvement and school effectiveness (Fullan, 1991).

Meaningful school improvement begins with cultural change-and cultural change begins with the school leader. (Reeves, 2007). The impact of leadership upon student achievement seems to be mediated by characteristics of school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1996), including assumptions, values, and beliefs of the school's members as evidenced in their everyday actions (Fullan, 1991). Successful principals are those who create a culture that accepts and encourages collaboration, risk-taking, and change in teaching practices that leads to the development of norms, expectations and behaviors that foster school improvement (Marzano, 2005).

Today's school leaders are expected to develop the abilities and skills of students, parents, teachers, and other administrators in order to facilitate a more shared leadership behavior (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The explicit sharing of power by principals with teachers is seen as essential to the success of site-
based management and shared decision-making strategies. Teachers have more autonomy, greater job satisfaction, more collaboration, and more buy-in when led by an effective leader. Schools with effective leaders also have a greater teacher retention rate than those with ineffective leaders (Cotton, 2003). A school that fosters a collaborative culture ensures a setting where learning is valued for both teachers and students.

An effective school with a collaborative school culture has a clearly defined vision and specific goals and outcomes. The vision and goals of the school provide clarity of purpose and direction for the school body. Research suggests that a change in school culture requires the joint development of visions and goals by all stakeholders to ensure purpose and commitment (Fiore, 2000). Time and energy expended in shaping school culture provides the vested interest necessary for success. The school’s leadership must help to develop a shared understanding of the school and its activities and goals that can provide a sense of purpose and vision (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

Building school and community relations is another crucial indicator of a collaborative school culture. Schools with collaborative cultures foster relationships with parents and community members. Tangri and Moles (1987) explain the rationale for parent and community involvement in the following way: “The concept of parent (and community) participation in educational design making is closely linked to democratic ideals of citizen participation in the affairs of government” (p. 520). Building strong relations with the community strengthens the commitment and dedication of those that can best help to ensure the success of students.
Fostering a school culture that positively affects student achievement is critical. According to Weller and Weller (2001) school reform requires the transformation of school culture. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) reported that only cultural change in schools will bring about real reform and lasting changes that will affect student academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The major focus of the American reform and restructuring movement of public education is improved student learning. The primary goal has been to increase student achievement. Although the debate continues as to what constitutes an effective school, most models list an effective school culture as key. This study examines the relationship between effective school cultures as measured by the School Culture Survey (Gruenert, 1998) and student achievement as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT).

The School Culture Survey provides insight toward the collaborative nature of school cultures in regards to the following factors: Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership (Gruenert, 1998).

The Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) measures student mastery (proficiency) of the content standards in the Alabama Course of Study in Reading and Mathematics. The ARMT scores are derived from selected items contained on the Stanford 10, as well as additional reading and mathematics items. The ARMT scores are used for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is an accountability measure for all schools. The percent of students who score at a
proficient level or above on the ARMT must be equal to or exceed the state established annual measurable objectives.

The analysis for this study was based on the school culture characteristics that relate to student academic achievement on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) in reading and mathematics. The six factors of the School Culture Survey (SCS) were used as independent variables, and the student academic achievement scores of the ARMT in reading and mathematics were used as dependent variables. Multiple linear regressions using SPSS were used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate if various elements of school culture are related to increased student academic achievement. The research questions for this is, "Does school culture impact student achievement in Reading and/or Math?"

This study should provide valuable information to school administrators regarding school culture and the factors of school culture. School leaders may begin to shape the culture of their school in the direction of collaboration (Deal & Peterson, 1998). With gained information related to the relationship between school culture and student achievement, school leaders can better understand their school's collaborative culture. This should aid both leaders and teachers as they work to create a more effective school for their students.

Research Questions

This study will strive to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1:
• Is there a relationship between student achievement in Reading, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and one or more school culture factors of Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, Professional Development, and Learning Partnership and principal's years in the building while controlling for the Socioeconomic (SES) level?

Research Question 2:

• Is there a relationship between student achievement in Math, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and one or more school culture factors of Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, Professional Development, and Learning Partnership and principal's years in the building while controlling for the Socioeconomic (SES) level?

Definitions

*Collaborative Leadership* - the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with school staff. The leaders value teachers' ideas, seek input, engage staff in decision-making, and trust the professional judgment of the staff. Leaders support and reward risk-taking and innovative ideas designed to improve education for the students. Leaders reinforce the sharing of ideas and effective practices among all staff (Gruenert, 1998).
Teacher Collaboration - the degree to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue that furthers the educational vision of the school. Teachers across the school plan together, observe and discuss teaching practices, evaluate programs, and develop an awareness of the practices and programs of other teachers (Gruenert, 1998).

Professional Development - the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. Teachers seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, organizations, and other professional sources to maintain current knowledge, particularly current knowledge about instructional practices (Gruenert, 1998).

Collegial Support - the degree to which teachers work together effectively. Teachers trust each other, value each other's ideas, and assist each other as they work to accomplish the tasks of the school (Gruenert, 1998).

Unity of Purpose - the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school. Teachers understand, support, and perform in accordance with that mission (Gruenert, 1998).

Learning Partnership - the degree to which teachers, parents, and students work together for the common good of the student. Parents and teachers share common expectations and communicate frequently about student performance. Parents trust teachers and students generally accept responsibility for their schooling (Gruenert, 1998).

Student Achievement – the student achievement in this study refers to the scores that students gain on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) in reading and math on the 3rd grade level.
Alabama Reading and Math Test - measures student mastery of the content standards in the Alabama Course of Study in Reading and Mathematics.

Delimitations

This research was conducted in one school district, Mobile County Public School System, Mobile, Alabama. It was limited to the perceptions of the elementary teachers in this school district that respond to the survey.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in the design of this study:

1. Participants were able to assess the culture of their schools, even though the questionnaire required no personally identifying information.

2. Participants responded honestly and interpreted the instrument as intended.

3. The perceptions of teachers' school culture can influence student achievement in Reading and Math.

Justification

This study is significant because it will bring additional information regarding the relationship between the factors of school culture and student achievement to the body of research in the field of school improvement. It may also influence educational leadership research to look for better ways to improve school culture. Higher education institutions may take into consideration the findings of this study when planning the training of potential school leaders. Moreover, school administrators may find additional information on the development of school culture. School staff development and in-service training
programs may modify their instruction of school cultures. In addition, the Mobile County Public School System may benefit from the results and findings of this study in the area of assessment and planning of effective school cultures. Finally, schools in general and elementary schools in particular may benefit since specific school culture characteristics have been found to be effective to improving student achievement.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The conceptual framework of this section contains two major themes: theoretical literature and empirical literature. The theoretical literature introduces (1) the definition of culture, (2) culture and anthropology, (3) culture and sociology, (4) culture and organizational development, (5) culture and corporations, and (6) culture and education. The empirical literature includes the factors that demonstrate how organization behaviors or characteristics in school culture impact student academic achievement. The school culture characteristics listed in the empirical literature include: (1) collaborative leadership, (2) teacher collaboration, (3) professional development, (4) collegial support, (5) unity of purpose, and (6) learning partnership.

Theoretical Literature

The Definition of Culture

Culture generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activity significance. Anthropologists most commonly use the term “culture” to refer to the human capacity to classify, codify, and communicate their experiences symbolically. Primatologists such as Jane Goodall refer to culture as “the way people live in accordance to beliefs, language, and history” (Goodall, 1986, p. 13). Seeking to provide a practical definition, social theorist Peter Walters describes culture simply as “shared schematic experience.”
Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society." As such, it includes the codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief (Jary & Jary, 1991).

Various definitions of culture reflect differing theories for understanding, or evaluating, human activity. Edward Burnett Taylor, writing from the perspective of social anthropology in the United Kingdom in 1871, described culture in the following way: "Culture or civilization taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1974, p. 46).

In 2002, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) described cultures as follows: "...culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, 2002, p. 7).

While these two definitions cover a range of meaning, they do not exhaust the many uses of the term "culture." In 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn compiled a list of more than 100 definitions of "culture" in Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). These definitions, and many others, provide a catalog of the elements of culture. The items catalogued (e.g., a law, a stone tool, a marriage) each have an existence and life-line of their own. They come into time at one set of coordinates and go
out of it another. While here, they change, so that one may speak of the evolution of the law or the tool.

Culture and Anthropology

In the field of anthropology, culture is defined as the customs of a group of people. "Culture has been treated as a thing, separate from individuals but with power, influence, and even rights over people. It is outside people and does something to them" (Musgrove, 1982, p. 113). According to Musgrove's view, in the field of anthropology, there is little, if any, difference in the historical definition of culture when compared to the current definition of culture. For example, in 1947, Linton stated, "...every society has a culture, no matter how simple this culture may be, and every human being is cultured" (p. 48). Musgrove (1982) quotes Radcliffe-Brown regarding the impact of culture on humans; "The presentation of culture is a mighty, independent thing, external to individuals but impinging powerfully upon them. All culture patterns act upon individuals" (p. 119).

According to Musgrove's (1982) study of the works of anthropologists, individual schools have their own culture that is identifiable by their history, traditions, artifacts, beliefs, and rituals. A culture will form and remain when groups of people are together working toward a common goal for any length of time. The field of anthropology can give understanding to educators as to how a school can develop and maintain a unique culture.

Culture and Sociology

Differing from the science of anthropology, the field of sociology usually focuses on cultures that are ethnically or geographically defined. However, the
study of any culture is referred to as “a group of people who work (or play) together and journey towards a shared meaning and assumption” (Griswold, 1994, p.133).

According to Griswold (1994), even though the term “culture” is commonly used and known, it is not easily defined or described. Sociologists usually include the characteristics of norms, values, beliefs, and symbols as factors used to describe culture. Norms are the way people behave in a given society; values are what people hold dear; beliefs are how people think the universe operates and symbols are representations of the culture.

In schools, teachers have certain expectations and behaviors (norms), such as asking students to conform to certain rules or procedures or by sharing materials with fellow teachers. Teachers may express their school values, or what is important to them, by honoring the hard work that students demonstrate or by teaching all students, regardless of their background. Teachers’ beliefs may be affected by how they see themselves as a part of the whole school and even the school system, or how the school fits into the surrounding community. Finally, symbols can be thought of as the common practices and habits that are not only accepted but expected such as children’s artwork on display or family announcements posted in the teachers’ workroom.

According to Griswold (1994), American schools engage in certain symbolic rituals, such as the preparation of report cards (a cultural object), because of the current and historical expectations of the school as an organization. Sometimes a school continues practices and procedures throughout time, even when the relevance or meaning is no longer obvious.
Schools form building-specific cultures to establish a collective identity and unite together. Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) hold that "the quality of relationships between workers and their co-workers is positively associated with commitment and satisfaction" (p. 72).

A toxic culture can develop and thrive in a school when the people within the school do not connect and work together toward a common goal or purpose. This causes the school to be unproductive, resulting in lower student achievement. Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) provide three models of organizations. The consensus model holds shared goals and values within an organization that are the norm and dissidence is a problem requiring correction. The cleavage model has distinct groups within an organization that have different interests, especially fault lines that exist between job levels. The fragmentation model shows organizations that are riddled with ambiguity where people hold multiple perspectives. It is plausible that schools can fall under all three models or have factions of each model within one school.

Culture and Organizational Development

Within the field of organizational development, Schneider, Brief, and Guzzo (1996) state that the "feel of an organization" reflects both its climate and culture. "Literally thousands of elements define a climate, and climate changes only when many of these everyday policies, practices, procedures, and routines change" (p. 9). Climate is made up of the beliefs and values that constitute an organization's culture. Schneider, et. al. differentiate culture as what the people in the organization worship. "Do they worship routine? Innovation? Quality? Risk-taking?" (p. 9). These authors believe that climate and culture are
interconnected. An organization's values and beliefs (part of culture) influence their interpretations of organizational policies, procedures and practices (organizational climate).

According to Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996), organizations have the ability to naturally self-organize. “Life organizes into greater levels of complexity to support more diversity and greater sustainability” (p. 3). Therefore, as complex organizations, schools will also naturally self-organize when necessary. As budgets get tighter, students more needy and conditions more stressful, the school as an organization will adapt and organize to sustain their day-to-day mission of educating children. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers set forth eight basic principles: (1.) Play is what keeps organizations alive, attractive, and working. “When play disappears, creativity ceases. Only fear and struggle persist” (p. 15). (2.) Experimentation and the freedom to be creative is called “organizing as play.” Organizations must explore and welcome the messy work that leads to solutions and new ways of working. (3.) Organization will instantly emerge without directive leaders, policies or ultimatums. Life requires that we change and provide space for our explorations. (4.) Organizations can organize around a change in beliefs, making creative connections, and nourishing new information. (5.) New information is vital to all members of a culture. “A self that fails to create itself as a contribution of others is irrelevant in a systems-seeking world” (p. 52). (6.) Selves organize because they have a love for their organizations and seek to improve them. (7.) All cultures can have emergence; “...the surprising capacity we discover only when we join together” (p. 99). (8.) Organizations understand change as continuous, creative energy and go about redesigning original
designs. "A healthy system uses its freedom to explore its identity. If we seek our own effectiveness, we cannot help but embrace more and more of those who are connected to us in ways we refused to see" (p. 101). This framework can be used to study schools as organizations and organizations as cultures. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers present an explanation of how organizations can either prosper or fail and have the freedom to continuously grow or stagnate.

Culture and Corporations

Bolman and Deal (1991) researched corporate cultures within the United States. According to their work, each business has a separate and distinct culture. "Every organization has a culture. Culture has a powerful influence throughout an organization" (p.4). Bolman and Deal noted the characteristics of a corporate culture consist of the environment, values, rites and rituals, networks and specific "players" that carried on jobs other than those formally assigned.

After spending years in top corporations such as General Electric and IBM, Bolman and Deal (1991) realized the importance of understanding a culture. A corporation's culture is critical to the success of the organization. A healthy, successful culture includes informal rules that determine how people interact and work together. People have greater job satisfaction, work harder, and are more productive when they are actually happy with their jobs. Culture can shape employees responses in strong, yet subtle ways. Bolman and Deal believe that in culture, there is strength.

Finally, Bolman and Deal (1991) expanded the definition of culture as beliefs based on an organization's rituals, symbols, myths, stories, and values. This is similar to Deal's definition with the addition of the elements of stories and
myths. Newcomers in a culture must be initiated and taught the ways of “how we do things around here” (p. 252).

Deal and Kennedy (1982) studied the success and failures of corporate organizations as related to their cultures. Their findings were relevant to all organizations where people worked together daily toward a common goal. Deal and Kennedy reported that culture ties people together and gives their lives meaning and purpose. When an organization is undergoing change, in order for the change to be successful, it must be within the rituals, informal rules and values of the environment. The organization and the stability of the culture must value all of the individuals within the culture so that everyone feels involved and needed. This enthusiasm ensures that they will work towards meaningful change.

Deal and Kennedy (1982) defined the ingredients for successful change within a culture. These are listed in seven steps: (1) position a hero in charge of the process, (2) recognize a real threat from the outside, (3) make transition rituals the pivotal elements of change, (4) provide transition training in new values and behavior patterns, (5) bring in outside shamans, (6) build tangible symbols in new directions, and (7) insist on the importance of security in transitions. They felt that culture can be changed if the managers who are empowered to change them are sensitive enough to the key cultural attributes—heroes, values, rituals—that must be affected if change is to succeed.

**Culture and Education**

Definitions are varied in the literature on school culture. Webster’s Dictionary defines culture as: (1) the growing of a particular crop, (2) the act of developing by education and training, (3) refinement of intellectual and artistic
taste, (4) a particular form or stage of civilization (5) expert care and training, and (6) the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. When you apply some of these definitions to a school building, the parameters that define a culture as a “group” and that as a culture “developed by education and training” are key. The culture of a school includes the conditions that are specific to the students, teachers, administrators, and parents of a school building. Although there may be people from many cultural groups within a building, the day-to-day interactions of the people who live and breath there create a unique culture.

Hargreaves (1997) focuses on successful school cultures. Characteristics of its members are composed of: openness, informality, care, attentiveness, lateral working relationships, reciprocal collaboration, candid and vibrant dialogue, and a willingness to face uncertainty together. He asserts that the emotional climate of a building is directly tied to the school’s culture. Researchers such as Fullan (1991) and Rosenholtz (1989) looked at the culture of schools to determine why some schools are progressive, welcoming, effective, and reform minded while others are not. They also compared the culture of a school with the leadership of the building administrator(s). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) use the concept of “culture” to refer to the guiding beliefs and expectations evident in the way a school operates, particularly in reference to how people relate (or fail to relate) to each other. In simple terms, culture is “the way we do things around here” (p. 37).

Cunningham and Gresso (1993) researched school culture and the impact school leaders have on school cultures. They defined effective school cultures as
those that accomplished achievements through a collective vision. "All schools have cultures; strong or weak, functional or dysfunctional. Successful schools seem to have strong and functional cultures aligned with a vision of excellence in schooling....strong, functional cultures must be nourished, nurtured and supported through the correlates of cultural development" (p. 50).

The majority of research related to school culture relates to how schools face change and how this change affects the culture of the school. In The New Meaning of Educational Reform (1991), Fullan describes the meaning in change: "if reforms are to be successful, individuals and groups must find meaning concerning what should change as well as how to go about it." (p. xi) He makes a direct relationship between change and culture; "Reform is not putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of the classrooms, schools, districts, universities, and so on" (p. xii).

Shaw and Reyes (1992) saw no single "...comprehensive organizational theory that fully explains the complexity of the school as a social organization." (p. 295). Their study looked at the organizational values and commitments of educators at both the elementary and secondary levels. They sought to examine the aspects of the complexity of the school organization from a cultural perspective. Kroeber and Kluckhorn (1968) were anthropologists who cited 164 different definitions of culture that were both simple to complex. Shaw and Reyes found differences in culture across schools based on levels of commitment, value orientation, and the relationship between the two.

Barth (1990) sees change and the concept of school improvement as an endless list of characteristics that attempt to make an "effective principal", 

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"effective teacher" and an "effective school". He believes true school improvement occurs when children and adults are put in situations to learn simultaneously, think critically, solve problems important to them, and become a true community of learners. Change or improvement must be sought and achieved collectively.

Barth (1990) believes that building communities of learners in schools is important to the culture of a school. He holds four assumptions: (1) Schools have the capacity to improve themselves, if the conditions are right, (2) Adults and students alike learn and each energizes and contributes to the learning of the other, (3) What needs to be improved about schools is their culture, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the nature and quality of learning experiences, and (4) School improvement is an effort to determine and provide conditions under which the adults and students will promote and sustain growth among themselves. "Taking these assumptions seriously leads to some fresh thinking about the culture of schools and about what people do in them" (p. 45).

**Related Literature and Research on School Culture**

In order for successful change to occur within schools, we must analyze the relationship between school culture and change. The success or failure of school reform initiatives and staff development projects is directly related to a school's culture. Without realizing the importance of school culture, change and reform will not produce positive results in student achievement. According to Hughes and Andreas (1995) all educators within a school must be involved in the change process at their comfort level and as a unified group. If a strong culture exists, they are more likely to withstand the "...questions, struggles, and hurdles
that comes with the implementation of anything new" (p.30). Ineffective change strategies are those that are done to people, not with them. A culture has to want to enhance itself and the "...impetus for change must come from those who will have to deal with the changes on a daily basis" (p. 29) and wish to incorporate change into their culture. Hughes and Andreas quote Heider from the Tao of Leadership, "Whatever is flexible and flowing will tend to grow. Whatever is rigid and blocked will atrophy and die" (p. 32).

Researchers such as Hughes and Andreas (1995) and Licklider (1997) report on how to implement effective change that will involve meaningful staff development programs. Hopkins (1990) wrote about integrating staff development and school improvement by studying school climate. He feels that by working with both teacher development and school improvement, new undertakings will be sustained. "It is a utopian dream until we reconceptualize the school on the dynamics and functioning at two levels--the structural and psychological" (p. 42). "From a school improvement perspective, the most exciting aspect of research into school climate is that these characteristics are related to the school's social system and are not dependent on external factors" (p. 45) such as staff development programs.

Sarason (1996), a central authority in the field of psychology, has focused his efforts on studying how change and school culture are interwoven. He first took on this controversial topic in 1971 with The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change. Sarason argued that schools are complicated places where teachers often have little time for new ideas, and that innovative ideas must be worked on through a system of relationships between educators. He feels that
changing a culture is tough work and must be done in a comprehensive way if it is to occur with any lasting significance.

Hamilton and Richardson (1995) studied the connections between school culture and the outcomes of staff development. They analyzed which elements of a school's culture affected change after staff development activities were implemented. Hamilton and Richardson concluded that the elements of school culture and the expectations for participation within the staff development process strongly affect progress toward group collaboration and teacher empowerment.

Englert and Tarrant (1995) studied the relationship between collaborative culture and school change. They focused on involving teachers in the educational change process as informed agents, problem solvers, and collaborators. They argued that teachers must be given time for implementing new instructional strategies. To call a culture truly collaborative, there must be shared vision, shared language, and mechanisms for problem solving.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) discuss two types of school culture, individualistic and collaborative, with very different implications for change and improvement. Teachers naturally become isolated over the course of time because of the nature of traditional schools in the United States. This practice of individualism makes it easier for teachers to fend off change and refrain from supporting new initiatives. However, in a collaborative school culture, teachers believe that their success is dependent on their collaborative approach. They depend on one another and believe that two minds are definitely greater than one. Giving and receiving help is seen as positive. When teachers work in a
collaborative environment, they are more accustomed to change and are more likely to support new teaching strategies that will benefit student achievement. Fullan and Hargreaves identify the teachers' and students' workplace as the key to any reform. If the school culture supports teacher growth and school improvement, true change can occur (1996).

Rosenholtz (1989) studied the school culture of 78 elementary schools in Tennessee to determine which ones were "stuck" (learning impoverished) and which ones were "moving" (learning enriched). She found that stuck schools were not supportive of change or improvement and were embedded in uncertainty and isolation. In "moving" schools, teachers worked together and the belief existed that teachers never stopped learning, especially from each other. Open support and communication gave the teachers more confidence, more certainty, and more achievement thus enabling their students to achieve more.

The Impact of Culture

Goodlad (1984) found that, "as alike as schools may be in many ways, each school has an ambience (or culture) of its own and, further, its ambience may suggest to the careful observer useful approaches to making it a better school" (p. 81). According to Krueger and Parish (1982), in their study of several start and stop initiatives, propose that the key to program implementation and success is "the interactive relationships that teachers have worked out together regarding 'how we get things done here' " (p. 133). Depending upon how well leaders understand and use this notion, culture can assist school improvement efforts for at-risk students, or act as a barrier to change (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).
A community’s culture is usually somewhat evident in the culture of the schools in that community. When a school is undertaking a reform effort, it must consider the values, beliefs, and norms of both the school and the community outside the school (Sarason, 1982).

Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986) summarize the general knowledge base regarding school culture: School culture does affect the behavior and achievement of elementary and secondary school students (though the effect of classroom and student variables remains greater). School culture is created and can be manipulated by people within the school. Even though school culture may be similar, no two schools will be exactly alike. To the extent that it provides a focus and clear purpose for the school, culture becomes the cohesion that bonds the school together as it goes about its mission.

A school's culture can be counterproductive and an obstacle to success. Culture can also be oppressive and discriminatory for various subgroups within the school. Lasting fundamental change (e.g. changes in teaching practices or the decision making structure) requires understanding and, often, altering the school's culture; cultural change is a slow process.

Attitudes and Beliefs

A school's culture has a tremendous impact on school improvement efforts. The attitudes and beliefs of those responsible for school reform help to shape the culture of the school. Many times initiatives are not successful because they conflict with deeply held beliefs and traditional practices of those responsible for implementing the change (Senge, 1990). The failure of a change initiative is common throughout schools. The attitudes and beliefs of those
opposing the change create expectations of what schooling is and how others in the school should respond to change. It is from these attitudes and beliefs that a toxic culture can be formed. Often times, this negative culture, or belief system, is what causes people to oppose change and is one of the greatest barriers to successful change (Sarason, 1982). If untested, this assumption becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Goldman & O'Shea (1990) in their analysis of their school note that paranoia exists that says "they won't let me do it," or "I knew things hadn't changed," or "there they go again" (p. 43). This paranoia creates barriers to change.

Fine (1991) asserts that educators generate belief systems because they need to explain their efforts in ways that give them a sense of accomplishment. These belief systems may help educators feel more successful, but may also prevent them from imagining what could be.

Patterson, Purkey, and Parker (1986) outline five prevailing assumptions about schools. The first is that "school systems are guided by a single set of uniform goals"; a second is that "power in school systems is (and should be) located at the top" (p. 7). These assumptions, the researchers believe, contribute to behaviors among school staff that prevent power sharing. Third, "decision making in school systems is seen as a logical problem-solving process that arrives at the one best solution" (p. 8); alternatives or modifications of this "one best solution" may not be sought. An extension of this idea is that "there is one best way to teach for maximum educational effectiveness" (p. 8). Finally, the belief that "the public is supportive of school systems and influences them in
predictable and marginal ways" (p. 8) ignores the impact that parents and the community have on schools.

Internalization of the Culture

Because of the impact of cultural norms on school improvement, the extent to which individual staff members internalize that culture affects improvement efforts as well. Schein (1985) explains that "every organization is concerned about the degree to which people at all levels 'fit' into it" (p. 42). Those new to the organization must learn the culture or suffer consequences, such as the feeling of alienation. If, on the other hand, the employee is "oversocialized", "the result is total conformity, leading to the inability on the part of the organization to be innovative" (Schein, 1985, p. 42). Schein (1985) delineates the elements that affect the degree to which culture is internalized.

Cultural Norms that Facilitate School Improvement

Researchers have found particular cultural norms that can facilitate school improvement. Norms such as introspection, collegiality, and a shared sense of purpose or vision combine to create a culture that supports innovation (Staessens, 1991). In her study of nine primary schools in Belgium, Staessens found that a school culture with these norms was instrumental in the school's ability to sustain school improvement. Saphier and King (1985) list from their experience twelve norms of school culture that support significant, continuous, and widespread improvements in instruction. These include norms that encourage: high expectations; experimentation; use of the knowledge bases; involvement in decision making; protection of what's important; collegiality; trust and confidence; tangible support; appreciation and recognition; caring,
celebration, and humor; traditions; and honest, open communication. The degree to which these norms are strong makes a difference in the ability of school improvement activities to have a lasting, or even any, effect. Other writers confirm the need for cultural norms that support change efforts.

**Empirical Literature**

**Collaborative Leadership**

The principal is the means of access to creating and sustaining positive school cultures (Fiore, 2000). A collaborative approach to leadership fosters a new framework for school improvement. In shared leadership, “principals and teachers participate together as mutual learners and leaders” (Lambert, 2002). Cotton found that in order for school-based management structures to be effective, teachers needed to have increased authority to make decisions concerning matters of curriculum and instruction (Cotton, 2003).

Many researchers have found that participation in decision making by those affected by the school improvement effort is essential to successful implementation and sustainability (Marzano, 2003). When teachers are involved in decisions or plans that will affect them they are more likely to be supportive of the change. Involvement in decision-making also makes it more likely that teachers will assume responsibility for the success of the decision and will not blame others (Sarason, 1982).

In 1994, Blase and Blase found that schools and principals were more effective when teachers had high opportunities to participate in shared decision-making. By providing the opportunity for teachers to discuss and plan changes, leaders ensure a higher quality implementation of a change initiative and greater
commitment to and ownership of the imitative. Teachers want their students to be successful, in part, because they want their own ideas and efforts to be successful (Cotton, 2003). Participation in decision making helps people acquire the knowledge and skills needed to change their behavior and contribute to successful implementation of a change initiative (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

Also, when teachers are not involved in the decision-making process, they are less likely to be supportive of the decisions and implement the mandated changes. According to Giroux (1998), when teachers feel that they can influence decisions, they also feel that they can have a greater impact on students. When teachers feel that they are not a part of decision-making, they are more likely to feel that they cannot have a positive impact on student achievement. (Fine, 1991).

According to Louis and Miles (1990), even when an initial idea originates from the principal, teachers need to know they can influence the implementation of the idea in real ways. The staff should be rewarded for contributing to the process and taking part in decision-making. Sharing decision-making is not just a matter of exhorting staff to believe but also a way of sharing responsibility and accountability. Change leaders share success stories among the entire staff to reinforce the belief that change and achievement are possible. Not only do they communicate the vision and invite interest, but they do so frequently and consistently (Fine, 1991).

Teacher Collaboration

In a school context, collaboration is the direct interaction between at least two equal parties who voluntarily engage in shared decision-making as they work
toward a common goal (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Teachers who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Despite overwhelming research indicating that working collaboratively represents best practice and is beneficial for all, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation (Cotton, 2003). Therefore, structures must be created to promote a collaborative culture.

A two-fold benefit exists in true collaboration. Teachers actually work together to complete tasks and teachers feel important and part of a team. In professional learning communities, teachers work together to analyze and improve classroom practice. Teachers work naturally together, planning, problem solving, and participating in activities that promote not only student learning, but also adult learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement (DeFour, DeFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004).

Collaboration emphasizes team decision-making and requires participants to set goals and implement plans (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Teacher collaboration must be voluntary. Teachers are more likely to collaborate with peers that they respect and that they know will participate in an equal level as themselves. Shared responsibility and accountability benefit a collaborative relationship (Cotton, 2003).

There are many benefits to teacher collaboration. First, shared planning and goal setting helps teachers gain ownership of the instructional process and establish instructional goals. Teachers who collaborate feel responsible for attaining a positive outcome (Deal, 1993). Collaboration encourages teachers to share goals and objectives. Teachers become aware of and concerned for not
just the success of their own students, but also of all students. (Stolp & Smith, 1994). Second, collaboration creates opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. Teachers who collaborate are more likely to establish longlasting and trusting professional relationships (Lieberman & Miller, 1990). The opportunity to learn from others teaching styles, experiences, and ideas are a great benefit to collaboration (Cotton, 2003). Third, collaboration gives teachers an opportunity to work together to bring about school change.

Teacher collaboration has the ability to greatly support school reform and initiatives. In the long run, teachers who collaborate together view themselves as integral to the change process. Collaboration leads to a sense of collegiality. It also encourages a climate that is amenable to new perspectives and attitudes. Consequently, teachers become stakeholders in the process of school change, achieve a higher degree of ownership and consider themselves accountable for achieving the specified goals.

**Collegiality**

Collegiality is the way in which teachers work together in a meaningful and professional manner (Marzano, 2005). Collegiality allows teachers to develop professional relationships that are cordial and friendly. A study conducted by the Minnesota State Department of Education in 1985 revealed that there are four types of collegial practices that characterize successful schools: (1) frequent, continuous, and increasingly precise talk about teaching practice; (2) observation of teaching with useful post conversations; (3) teaching materials that are planned, designed, researched, evaluated, and prepared by teachers working together; and (4) staff members teaching each other instructional procedures.
The relationships between staff members is crucial in determining continuous school improvement.

Collegial relationships in a school ensure that norms of conduct and behavior are established that allow teachers to be a part of the governing structures of the school’s decision-making process (Marzano, 2003). Developing collaborative cultures helps reduce the professional isolation of teachers, allows the sharing of successful practices and provides support. Collaboration raises morale, enthusiasm, and the teachers’ sense of efficacy and makes teachers more receptive to new ideas (Fullan, 1991).

Barth (1990) suggests that there are several advantages of collegial relationships. Typically, teachers make more sound and solid decisions when they have a collegial relationship with their peers. Teachers are also more likely to implement the decisions that have been made. There is a higher level of morale and trust among adults who have collegial relationships. Adult learning is energized and more likely to be sustained. There is even some evidence that motivation of students and their achievement rises, and evidence that when adults share and cooperate, students tend to do the same. “The relationships among adults in schools allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement. Unless adults talk with one another, observe one another, and help one another, very little will change.” (p. 31)

Collegiality is best described as authentic interactions that are professional in nature (Marzano, 2005). In collegial relationships, teachers openly share failures and mistakes, demonstrate respect for one another, and constructively analyze and criticize teaching practices and procedures (Fullan &
Collegial relationships cannot be forced or required. Teachers must be allowed and encouraged to develop collegial relationships through opportunities to plan together and work together in meaningful ways (Marzano, 2005).

Collegial relationships facilitate change because change involves learning to do something new, and interaction is the primary basis for social learning. New meanings, new behaviors, new skills, and new beliefs depend significantly on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals or are exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work (Fullan, 1991). Deal and Kennedy (1982) reinforce the idea that people will change more readily as a result of a desire to have personal ties with others.

When a lack of collegiality exists, school reform efforts are not likely to be successful because teachers are more likely to resist and resent the change process (Corbett, Dawson, & Firestone, 1984). Administrators must be aware of the importance of fostering collegial relationships. Schlechty and Cole (1991) note that the ways in which changes are introduced may breed rivalry among teachers. Thus an important leadership responsibility of principals is supporting collegial interactions between teachers (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1984).

**Professional Development**

The instructional leader is responsible for the learning of the teachers in the school (Lambert, 2002). Research by the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) found that what teachers know about the subjects they teach and whether they have access to the latest research and materials on those subjects is essential to achieving high levels of student
performance (NAESP, 2001). Successful principals are more likely to offer more opportunities for professional development and a greater variety of opportunities than less successful principals (Marzano, 2005).

Historically staff development practice has been limited, fragmented, one-shot or short term and pre-packaged. Most often, the professional development opportunities are unconnected and do not match the needs of the school (Guskey, 2000). Sparks (1995) believes that staff development should consist of a broad range of processes and activities that contribute to the learning of educators, but most educators have a narrow conception of staff development with only workshops and in-services. Guskey (2000) proposes that professional development is a process and activities must be designed to enhance professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Developing teacher knowledge and skills is more than acquiring existing skills and knowledge. It also includes enabling teachers to reflect critically on their practice and fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). “In order to change practice in significant and worthwhile ways, teachers must not only learn new subject matter and new instructional techniques, but they must alter their beliefs and conceptions of practice, their theories of action” (Smylie, 1995, p. 93). School must be a place where students and adults alike are responsible not only for student learning but for their own learning and that of their colleagues. When adults stop learning, so do students (NAESP, 2001).

Teachers’ efforts to improve instruction must be supported by the principal. Patterson, Purkey and Parker (1986) found that for teachers, access to
information, availability of resources, and support from administrators is critical to successful implementation of a change initiative.

The staff development that teachers attend must be closely linked to school goals. "Unclear and unspecified changes can cause great anxiety and frustration to those sincerely trying to implement them" (Fullan, 1991, p. 70).

Teachers must have meaningful opportunities for professional development. A limited knowledge base and lack of follow-up support contribute to teachers' reluctance to adopt new programs (Barth, 1990).

Change requires a real understanding on the part of teachers and other people in schools about how to implement change (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p.84). Change initiatives are sometimes not successful because teachers lack a real understanding of the goals of the change initiative. A high level of implementation support and follow-up professional development create greater success of the implementation of new programs.

*Learning Partnership*

The leadership capacity of the entire school community, including teachers, students, and parents must be developed for maximized student success (Lambert, 2003). The lack of strong school/community partnerships inhibits high performance (SEDL). Educators must realize the importance of parents as a child's instructional leader. Schools where parents and teachers are supportive of each other and have close relationships acquire a more community atmosphere (Cotton, 2003). Parents need to be involved as co-teachers in their children's education. To isolate the school from the broader community overlooks this need for a sense of mutual purpose and partnership (Marzano, 2003).
Parents, business leaders, and community stakeholders have an interest in public schools. They must also have input in decisions that affect the schools in their community (NAESP, 2000). Effective principals realize that school improvement efforts must include a shared vision, collaboration, and involvement of all stakeholders (Lambert, 2003). In order for a school's culture to flourish, the school must establish effective methods of communicating with parents and with the community and ways for parents and the community to be involved in the school (Marzano, 2005).

According to Downey (2002), most research regarding parental involvement includes two aspects: the effects of parental interaction and involvement in school, and the impact of parental involvement at home. Good parent-teacher relationships contribute to a child's success in school. "When parents communicate constructively with teachers and participate in school activities, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of their children at school and they may learn from teachers how to work at home to enhance their children's education" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). When parents meet with teachers to discuss student progress, students are more likely to realize the connection between home and school (Epstein & Lee, 1995). This is also likely to signal to children the parents' values and expectations for them.

Research suggests that parental involvement positively impacts student learning (NAESP, 2000). Involved parents sense that the school values and welcomes their ideas and their participation. Principals and teachers create a school where families feel welcome by regularly inviting parents into the building (Marzano, 2003). If parents are serious about helping their children do well in
school, improving their relationship with teachers and involvement in school activities are worthy goals (Cotton, 2003).

What parents do at home plays an important role in shaping a child's success in school. When parents are involved in their child's school life, their child is less likely to be absent from school, be late to school, or drop out of school (Marzano, 2003). Children with parents who hope and expect them to do well are more likely to do well in school than their counterparts with parents who do not have high education expectations for their children (Downey, 2002).

Unity of Purpose

An important aspect of vision is the notion of "shared vision." "Some studies indicate that it is the presence of this personal vision on the part of a leader, shared with members of the organization, that may differentiate true leaders from mere managers" (Manasse, 1986, p. 151). A leader's vision needs to be shared by those who will be involved in the realization of the vision.

Murphy (1988) stressed the need for the development of a shared vision. "It is rare to see a clearly defined vision articulated by a leader at the top of the hierarchy and then installed by followers" (p. 656). Whether the vision of an organization is developed collaboratively or initiated by the leader and agreed to by the followers, it becomes the common ground, the shared vision that compels all involved. Vision comes alive only when it is shared.

Research has shown that a principal's strong focus on academics is a key to student achievement (Marzano, 2005). Principals of high achieving schools are likely to emphasize learning as the most important purpose of schooling. They also reach out to stakeholders to help shape and support the school's
vision and goals (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993). Mission statements, slogans, mottoes, and displays emphasizing the school's academic goals are highly visible in successful schools (Cotton, 2003).

Numerous researchers have found that sharing a common vision increases the likelihood that school improvement efforts will succeed (NAESP, 2001). A shared vision among students, faculty, parents, and the community is a feature of schools in which all students are most likely to succeed academically. If this shared sense of purpose exists, members of the school community are able to spell out what constitutes good performance in a relatively precise and consistent way. Without a shared vision, students, teachers, administrators, and parents do not know what is expected of them (Deal & Peterson, 1998). A shared vision helps point out what is important to develop and protect in the school.

A shared vision is one to which many people are truly committed, because it reflects their own personal vision. A vision that is not consistent with values by which people live continuously will fail to inspire and often will foster cynicism (Senge, 1990). The school leader must establish clear goals and keep those goals in the forefront of the school's attention. Effective execution of this responsibility provides a safeguard against expending vast amounts of energy and resources on school improvement initiatives that go nowhere.

Review

Deal & Peterson (1998) believe that culture is the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that build up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. School culture includes the traditions, values, and beliefs that are held in common by students, teachers, and principals.
Successful schools seem to have strong and functional cultures aligned with a vision of quality schooling. A review of literature related to school culture clearly supports the collaborative school culture as the type of culture that positively affects student achievement (Fullan, 1998; Marzano, 2005; & Rosenholtz, 1989). School improvement and reform efforts have been found to be more successful when implemented in a school with a collaborative culture (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Leaders of effective schools must continue to develop a greater understanding of and appreciation for the necessity and the influence of school culture on student achievement (Levine & Lezotte, 1990).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methods and procedures that were used to collect and analyze the data of this study, including information regarding the participants and samples, instrumentation, data collection procedures and statistical data analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

During the 2006-07 school year, the Mobile County Public School System (MCPSS) administered the School Culture Survey (SCS) to teachers in the elementary schools in the district. All elementary schools in the MCPSS were invited to participate in the study of school culture. The SCS was distributed to elementary school principals at a systemwide principal's meeting. The principals were instructed to administer the survey during a faculty meeting at their schools and return the completed survey to a designated location.

Samples and Participants

This study was conducted using information from elementary schools in the Mobile County Public School System in Mobile, Alabama. There are 62 elementary schools in Mobile County. Fifty-nine elementary schools responded to the survey.

There were no financial costs to participate in this study. The elementary schools that are a part of this study were not identified. Any information disclosed about the project in the future will focus on building-level, not individual, results. There were no identifiable risks associated with the use of this survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary.
Instrumentation

The School Culture Survey (SCS) (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) was used to assess school culture. Gruenert and Valentine developed the SCS to provide school personnel insight toward the collaborative nature of school culture (Gruenert, 1998). The SCS was developed by analyzing 632 useable teacher-response surveys from 27 schools at the Missouri Center for School Improvement's Project ASSIST (Achieving Successes through School Improvement Site Teams). The SCS is a 35-item, Likert description questionnaire, with the Likert ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Factor analysis resulted in the following dimensions or subscales of school culture: Collaborative Leadership (items 2, 7, 11, 14, 18, 20, 22, 26, 28, and 32), Teacher Collaboration (items 3, 8, 15, 23, 29, and 33), Professional Development (items 1, 9, 16, 24, and 30), Unity of Purpose (items 5, 12, 19, 27, and 31), Collegial Support (items 4, 10, 17, and 25), and Learning Partnership (items 6, 13, 21, and 35). These six dimensions are based on a review of the literature on school culture, effective school cultures, and collaborative school culture (Gruenert, 1998). The validity and reliability of the School Culture Survey (SCS) have been tested through numerous research programs, dissertations and other research projects throughout the United States (Gruenert, 1998).

Validity and reliability

In order to assess the validity of the SCS, Gruenert (1998) administered the School Climate Survey to the participants at the same time with SCS. The School Climate Survey was an established instrument developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals to assist with planning, budgeting,
school accreditation reports, school initiatives, and longitudinal research (Keefe &
Howard, 1997). Only four (Teacher-Student Relations, Administration, Student
Academic Orientation, and Instructional Management) out of ten factors in the
School Climate Survey were chosen to correlate with the school culture survey
because the school climate factors not used were insufficient in their capacity to
reflect elements of culture (Gruenert, 1998). He found that each of the six
School Culture factors was highly correlated with a minimum of two of the four
climate factors of the School Climate Survey.

1. The culture factor Collaborative Leadership corrected with
   Teacher/Student Relations \( r = .633 \), Administration \( r = .657 \),
   and Instructional Management \( r = .488 \).

2. The culture factor Teacher Collaboration correlated significantly
   with Teacher/Student Relations \( r = .532 \) and Student Academic
   Orientation \( r = .483 \).

3. Unity of Purpose correlated significantly with all four school
   climate factors. Those correlations were Teacher/Student
   Relationships \( r = .387 \), Student Academic Orientation \( r =
   .485 \), Administration \( r = .384 \), and Instructional Management \( r
   = .454 \).

4. Professional Development correlations were statistically
   significant with two climate factors, Teacher/Student Relations \( r
   = .436 \) and Student Academic Orientation \( r = .475 \).
5. Collegial Support was statistically significant with Teacher/Student Relations ($r = .506$) and Administration ($r = .544$).

6. Learning Partnership was statistically significant with Student Academic Orientation ($r = .416$) and Instructional Management ($r = .439$).

Overall, fifteen of the 24 correlations were significant at the .05 level and another seven were significant at the .01 level. Therefore, the new School Culture Survey correlated highly with the established School Climate Survey. These relationships support the validity of the SCS (Gruenert, 1998).

Student Achievement

Student achievement was based on 3rd grade students' scores on the Alabama Reading and Math Test as reported on the annual School Accountability Report published by the Alabama State Department of Education for the 2005-06 school year. The Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) measures student mastery (proficiency) of the content standards in the Alabama Course of Study in Reading and Mathematics. The ARMT scores are derived from selected items contained on the Stanford 10, as well as additional reading and mathematics items. The ARMT closely resembles the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This test is given in the Spring of each year and usually takes about two days to administer. The Alabama State Department of Education's web page contains the item specifications for the ARMT. The ARMT scores are used for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is an accountability measure for all schools. The percent of students who score at a
proficient level or above on the ARMT must be equal to or exceed the state established annual measurable objectives.

Other Factors

Other factors that may affect a school's collaborative culture including principal's years in the building and students' socioeconomic status were also included.

This study looked at the number of years that a principal has been in the building as a factor that affects a school's collaborative culture. Research has shown that the success of a school is measured by improvement or decline in specific student academic areas over a period of time. Therefore, the principal should have been in the school for a minimum of three years to affect student achievement (Barth, 1990; Cotton, 2003; & Heck, 2006).

The socioeconomic level of families is also a factor that affects a school's collaborative culture and student achievement. Many poor, insufficient parental practices are highly correlated with socioeconomic status (Stevenson & Backer, 1987). Lareau (1987) found that teachers made active efforts on parent/teacher relationships to involve working-class and middle-class parents, but low-income parents were less involved. Children perform better in school when their learning is not comprised by hunger, distracting physical ailments, lack of adequate sleep, unattended visual limitations, or other health related problems (Lareau, 1987). When working-class parents have contact with teachers or schools, the parents often discuss non-academic issues, including their child's progress in school and ways to help their child at home, instead of the academic progress of their child or ways to help their child be successful in school.
Statistical Technique and Data Analysis Design

Multiple linear regression is a method of analysis for assessing the strength of the relationship between each of a set of explanatory variables (known as independent variables), and a single response (or dependent variable) (Landau & Everitt, 2004). Simply put, multiple linear regression analysis allows for the prediction of one variable from several other variables (Cronk, 2004). In this study, multiple linear regression was applied to analyze the data. The significance levels will be set at the level of .05 (p ≤ .05).

The analysis for this study was based on the school culture characteristics that relate to student academic achievement on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) in Reading and Mathematics. When running the data, the six factors of the School Culture Survey (SCS) were used as independent variables, and the student academic achievement scores of the ARMT in reading and mathematics were used as dependent variables. Multiple linear regression using SPSS was used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses.

The second step of analysis looked at the pattern of relationships between school culture and other school characteristics such as socioeconomic level and principal's years in the building. The scores of the School Culture Survey were used as dependent variables and the other school factors that may influence student achievement were used as independent variables.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the statistical analyses performed on teacher perceived collaborative school culture and its impact on student achievement in elementary schools in a large urban school district. Descriptive analyses contain the data frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations from samples and participants. The inferential analyses report the relationships between variables. The statistical methods used were descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. The units of analysis were schools and principals. Tables summarizing the results of the findings are contained within this chapter.

This study was conducted using information from elementary schools in the Mobile County Public School System in Mobile, Alabama. There are 62 elementary schools in Mobile County. Fifty-nine elementary schools responded to the survey, which is a 95% return rate.

The following will provide information concerning the demographic characteristics of the 59 elementary schools in this study. The socioeconomic level of the schools represented in this study is reported by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced priced meals at each of the elementary schools. The socioeconomic level of these schools ranged from a minimum of 28% of students receiving free and reduced priced meals to a maximum of 99% of students receiving free and reduced priced meals. Seven schools, or 12% have an SES level of less than 50% meaning that over one-half of the students at those do not receive free or reduced priced meals, thus signifying a higher
socioeconomic level. Twenty-two schools, or 37% have an SES level greater than 90%, which indicates that the majority of students receive free or reduced priced meals and are from families with a lower SES. The average SES level of the 59 schools was 76% free and reduced.

Table 1

_Socioeconomic Level of Elementary Schools in MCPSS (N = 59)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SES</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study looked at the number of years that a principal has been in the building as a factor that affects a school's collaborative culture. The principal's administrative experience at their current location ranged from 1 to 18 years, and the average years of the principal in the building was 6.08 years. Five schools had first year principals and thirteen schools had principals who had been assigned to the school for ten years or more. Although a principal's years in the building clearly influences student achievement and the culture of the school, no significant correlation was found between a principal's years in the building and student achievement or between a principal's years in the building and the SCS factors.

Table 2

_Principal’s Years in the Building at the Elementary Schools in MCPSS (N = 59)_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in Building</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in Building</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student achievement was based on 3rd grade students' scores on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) as reported on the annual School Accountability Report published by the Alabama State Department of Education for the 2005-06 school year. The Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) measures student mastery (proficiency) of the content standards in the Alabama Course of Study in Reading and Mathematics. The ARMT scores are derived from selected items contained on the Stanford 10, as well as additional reading and mathematics items. The percent of students who score at a proficient level or above (levels 3 or 4) on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) must be equal to or exceed the state established annual measurable objectives (Alabama State Department of Education, 2007).

For reading proficiency, the minimum score was 58% and the maximum score was 100%. At twenty-two schools, more than 50% of 3rd graders scored a Level 4, which is the highest level of proficiency. Mainly, these schools had a lower percent of students receiving free or reduced priced meals. At twenty-one schools no student scored a Level I, or failing rate, on the reading portion of the ARMT. These schools included all levels of SES.

For math proficiency, for 3rd grade students on the Alabama Reading and Math Test the minimum score was 64% and the maximum score was 98%. At thirty-one schools, more than 50% of 3rd graders scored a Level 4, which is the highest level of proficiency. These schools included those with both high and low socioeconomic levels. At twelve schools, no student scored a Level I, or failing rate, on the math portion of the ARMT. Theses schools included all SES levels of SES.
Table 3

ARMT Proficiency of the Elementary Schools in MCPSS (N = 59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Proficiency</td>
<td>58.01</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>82.27</td>
<td>9.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Proficiency</td>
<td>63.81</td>
<td>98.28</td>
<td>81.98</td>
<td>9.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The School Culture Survey scores provided insight toward the collaborative nature of school cultures in regards to the following factors: Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership (Gruenert, 1998).

The SCS is a 35-item, Likert description questionnaire, with the Likert ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

For this study, the minimum was in the area of Teacher Collaboration (2.61) and the maximum was in the area of Collegial Support (4.79). Although the scores of the factors on the SCS correlate, they do not predict student achievement. The Learning Partnership scores were lowest, indicating teachers' perceptions of a lack of parent and community involvement. Only eleven schools scored Learning Partnership with an average score of 4. Schools with the lowest Learning Partnership scores had the highest SES, with 83% or more students receiving free or reduced priced meals. These schools, except for one, had principals with fewer than five years in the building. Principals who have worked in the same school for a longer period of time have had more opportunities to establish themselves with parents and community stakeholders.
Scores on Teacher Collaboration indicate a need for improvement, with forty-five schools scoring a 3 or lower. Schools with the lowest Teacher Collaboration scores had higher SES levels. However, schools with high Teacher Collaboration scores included all levels of SES. Also, Teacher Collaboration scores seem to be consistent with the scores of Collegial Support. Teachers who have the opportunity to plan and collaborate with one another also seem to share a more collegial relationship.

Collaborative Leadership scores and Unity of Purpose scores were both similar. Schools with higher SES levels had lower SCS scores. Also, these schools had principals with fewer than five years in the building. Definitely, a principal's tenure in the building is a determining factor as to the level of collaborative leadership at the school and to the extent that the vision and purpose of the school is communicated.

Table 4

SCS Factors Results from MCPSS Survey (N = 59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Leadership</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collaboration</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity of Purpose</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Support</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Partnership</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Scale 1-5)
Statistical Analysis

The regression analysis answered the following questions:

Research Question 1:

- Is there a relationship between student achievement in Reading, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and one or more school culture factors of Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, Professional Development, and Learning Partnership and principal’s years in the building while controlling for the Socioeconomic (SES) level?

Research Question 2:

- Is there a relationship between student achievement in Mathematics, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and one or more school culture factors of Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, Professional Development, and Learning Partnership and principal’s years in the building while controlling for the Socioeconomic (SES) level?

Correlation coefficients were computed among the six School Culture Survey factors (Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, and Professional Development), the number of years that the principal has been assigned to the school (Years in Building), socio-economic status (SES) and reading and math proficiency. The results of the correlational analyses are presented in Table 4.4 show that 7 of the 8 correlations were statistically significant when pertaining to reading and math proficiency and were greater than or equal to the 0.30. Cohen (1988) suggests that correlations have

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a medium effect size between 0.30 and 0.49, irrespective of sign, and that correlations between 0.50 and 1.00 have a large effect size, irrespective of sign. SES had the highest correlations with reading and math proficiency at -0.535 and -0.690, respectively. In general, the signs and effect size of the correlations between reading and math proficiency suggest that as SES (as measured by % of free and reduced lunch students) goes up, reading and math proficiency goes down. The correlations of the six school culture survey factors to reading and math proficiency were all significant and all positive which suggested that as perceived school culture factors increased so did reading and math proficiency. The correlations of years in the building with reading and math proficiency tended to be low and thus not significant.

Table 5

Correlation Analysis (N=59)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math Proficiency</th>
<th>Reading Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>-.535**</td>
<td>-.690**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Building</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Leadership</td>
<td>.459**</td>
<td>.390**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collaboration</td>
<td>.400**</td>
<td>.351**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>.479**</td>
<td>.444**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity of Purpose</td>
<td>.508**</td>
<td>.457**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Support</td>
<td>.455**</td>
<td>.446**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Partnership</td>
<td>.503**</td>
<td>.437**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p < .001

The sets of predictors were ordered such that socioeconomic status (SES) was entered first into the equation. Then the School Culture Survey factors (Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of
Purpose, and Professional Development) and the number of years that the principal has been assigned to the school (Years in Building) were added to the initial predictor, SES.

SCS correlates with five of the six school culture factors. Schools with higher SES levels have lower SCS scores. A principal’s years in the building did not correlate with SES, SCS, or student achievement.

The multiple regressions present results of an evaluation of how well reading proficiency and math proficiency of 3rd grade students, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT), are predicted by socioeconomic status and how well the set of School Culture Survey factors (Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership), and principals years in the building predict reading and math proficiency over and above socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status, the first predictor, accounted for a significant amount of the reading variability of 3rd grade ARMT scores. For reading proficiency, \( R^2 = 0.475, F(1, 57) = 51.63, p < .001 \). The six SCS factors and Years in Building did not account for a significant proportion of the reading proficiency variance after controlling for the effects of SES. \( R^2 \) change = 0.087, \( F(7, 50) = 1.419, p = .219 \). There is no significant relationship between the reading scores and the school culture scores after controlling for SES. However, the \( R^2 \) change indicates 9% of the variance in reading proficiency can be attributed to the six SCS factors and Years in the Building.

The first predictor, SES, also accounted for a significant amount of the math variability of 3rd grade ARMT scores. For math proficiency, \( R^2 = 0.286, \)
F(1, 57) = 22.81569, p < .001. The six SCS factors and Years in Building did not account for a significant proportion of the math proficiency variance either after controlling for the effects of SES. $R^2$ change = 0.137, $F(7, 50) = 1.419$, $p = .133$. There is no significant relationship between the reading scores and the school culture scores after controlling for SES. However, the $R^2$ change indicates 14% of the variance in math proficiency can be attributed to the six SCS factors and Years in the Building.

The multiple regression analysis suggests that SES, with a negative linear relationship, accounts for a significant amount of reading and math proficiency variability, indicating that students with lower socioeconomic status are less likely to do well in reading and math proficiency.

Also, the SCS results and principal's years in the building were evaluated to determine if they predicted 3rd grade reading and math proficiency as measured by the ARMT over and above SES. The results suggest that students with similar socioeconomic levels are not likely to have better reading and math proficiency in schools with higher SCS factor scores (Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership) and more principal's years in the building.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between a school's collaborative culture, as measured by the School Culture Survey (SCS), and student academic achievement, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). The second purpose was to determine if elements of school culture and student achievement were affected by socioeconomic level and principals' years in the building. This study reviewed the previous literature and research on collaborative school cultures and student achievement.

Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the data and the results were used to test the research question. This study was conducted using archived survey results and information from elementary schools in the Mobile County Public School System in Mobile, Alabama. Fifty-nine elementary schools in Mobile County responded to the survey. The School Culture Survey (SCS) (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) was used to assess school culture. Valentine and Gruenert developed the SCS to provide school personnel insight toward the collaborative nature of school culture (Gruenert, 1998).

The main focus of the statistical analyses was on the relationship between collaborative school culture, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student achievement, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test. In addition, the factors of principal's years in the building and socioeconomic level were tested. The results from the analysis of this study are summarized in this section.
Conclusions and Discussion

Research Question 1 tested the relationship between student achievement in Reading, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and one or more school culture factors of Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, Professional Development, and Learning Partnership and principal's years in the building while controlling for the Socioeconomic (SES) level. The results of the regression analysis revealed no significant linear relationship between 3rd grade reading student achievement and the school culture factors after controlling for SES.

Research Question 2 tested the relationship between student achievement in Math, as measured by the Alabama Reading and Math Test, and one or more school culture factors of Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Teacher Collaboration, Unity of Purpose, Professional Development, and Learning Partnership and principal's years in the building while controlling for the Socioeconomic (SES) level. The results of the regression analysis revealed no significant linear relationship between 3rd grade math student achievement and the school culture factors after controlling for SES.

Socioeconomic status, the first predictor, accounted for a significant amount of the reading and math variability of 3rd grade ARMT scores. The six SCS factors and principal's years in the building did not account for a significant proportion of the reading or math proficiency variance after controlling for the effects of SES.

The multiple regression analysis suggests that SES accounts for a significant amount of reading and math proficiency variability, indicating that
students with lower socioeconomic status are less likely to do well in reading and math proficiency.

Also, the SCS and principal’s years in the building were evaluated to determine if they predicted 3rd grade reading and math proficiency as measured by the ARMT over and above SES. The results suggest that students with similar socioeconomic levels are not likely to have better reading and math proficiency in schools with higher SCS factor scores (Collaborative Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, Unity of Purpose, Collegial Support, and Learning Partnership) and more principal’s years in the building.

The literature review has indicated that it is difficult to track the linkages between a collaborative school culture and student achievement. The assertion that a collaborative school culture makes a difference in student achievement can be supported by theory and experience, but less clear to researchers and practitioners of educational administration is exactly how or precisely in what ways a collaborative school culture affects student achievement (Cotton, 2003). According to the review of literature, Marzano (2005) affirmed that the collaborative school culture, as established by the building principal, has both a direct and an indirect impact on student learning.

Typically, the positive effects of socioeconomics are mediated entirely by parenting practices, but it is difficult to differentiate precisely how parenting styles relate to socioeconomic status. A school leader needs to know that SES might play a different role when we want to find out the interactions between parents, children, and schools. For instance, a parent’s style of interaction with their children is influenced by a parent’s occupation (Kohn, 1969), and the type of
parent occupation is also related to how parents interact with teachers and school officials.

Limitations

Several research limitations were considered in this study. First, the study was completed in Mobile County, Alabama and ARMT scores were used as dependent variables. Therefore, any obtained relationships could only be applied to the schools in Mobile County. Second, the original survey collection was voluntary, so the scores might not fully present the complete assessment of the schools with lower survey return rates. Third, the author is a principal at one of the elementary schools included in this study, so the relationship between the principal (author) and the teachers at this elementary school may have had an impact on how the teachers responded to the survey.

Finally, it is worth noting again the circumstances under which this survey was administered. All elementary schools in the Mobile County Public School System were invited to participate in the study of school culture. The School Culture Survey was distributed to elementary school principals at a systemwide principal's meeting. The principals were instructed to administer the survey during a faculty meeting at their schools and return the completed survey to a designated location. This survey was only administered at elementary schools in Mobile County, resulting in a small sample size of schools surveyed.

Principals were most likely present in the faculty meeting when teachers completed the survey. Therefore, this method of survey administration most likely resulted in teachers' completing the survey without being completely honest and truthful with their opinions. Teachers may have felt as if their responses
could be linked to their actions and practices. If a toxic culture existed at the school, a teacher who responded honestly with low scores may have felt that she would suffer negative consequences for voicing her opinion in the survey. In contrast, if a teacher has a more personal relationship with the principal, the teacher may have given scores that were too high instead of honestly evaluating the school's culture. This social desirability effect would probably cause teachers to respond to the survey items more favorably.

Implications and Recommendations

There is certainly not a definitive answer about exactly how and to what extent school culture influences the quality of a school, but there are indications that it is a construct of importance. Principals may want to consider the following recommendations in the pursuit of school improvement. Principals could use the school culture survey to measure the strength and weakness of their school culture, and provide themselves an opportunity to cultivate a positive school culture based on the results of the study. Teachers and administrators at each school could decide if there are areas of school culture that they would like to improve. Researchers could use the same methodology to realize what other school factors could have a connection with student achievement. Researchers could use the same methodology to estimate student achievement on other standard tests of Reading and Math.

Final Thoughts

In this study, even though initially there was some correlation, none of the subscales of school culture was found to be a direct cause of student achievement as measured by the ARMT, when controlling for SES. There are
some possible reasons for the lack of significance. For instance, a school might provide services such as Teacher Collaboration, Professional Development, or Collegial Support, but those services might not be related to the real needs of teachers in the field for improving student achievement.

The outcomes of this study can be viewed as surprising but they are supported by the review of literature mentioned in Chapter 2. Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) state that the behaviors, beliefs, and symbolic leadership of principals have both direct and indirect impact on student learning, but many educators and scholars insist that all principal effects are indirect because they argue that a principal's influence on student outcomes is mediated through factors within and outside of the school environment. In this study, we found a similar phenomenon, in that different components of school culture were not found to be significant.

Socioeconomic status (SES) was found to be related to student achievement. As mentioned in Chapter 2, many of the insufficient parental practices are highly correlated with socioeconomic status, and this is one of the reasons children from disadvantaged backgrounds do less well in school than their more advantaged counterparts.

Some interesting related studies could be obtained by breaking down the topics in this study. Future research could use different variables and sample sizes to analyze the differences between groups. Every topic could be modified into narrower or broader perspectives depending on the researcher's interests and expertise. For instance, a future study can focus on the comparison of school culture between school levels or the comparison of school culture
between school sizes. Additionally, future investigation could include an analysis of schools with similar SES levels instead of schools representing a wide range of SES levels. This study could also be replicated in middle or high school to determine the relationship between the factors of a collaborative school culture and student achievement.
Susan,

This letter grants you permission to use the School Culture Survey for the duration of your dissertation research and applies only to your previously described research project.

Please provide us with a summary of your findings upon the completion of your study.

I wish you the best in your research.

Sincerely,

Jerry Valentine, PhD
Director, Middle Level Leadership Center
APPENDIX B

SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY FACTORS AND ITEMS

Collaborative Leadership
2. Leaders value teachers' ideas.
7. Leaders in this school trust the professional judgments of teachers.
11. Leaders take time to praise teachers that perform well.
14. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.
18. Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together.
20. Teachers are kept informed on current issues in the school.
22. My involvement in policy or decision-making is taken seriously.
26. Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.
28. Leaders support risk-taking and innovation in teaching.
32. Administrators protect instruction and planning time.
34. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.

Teacher Collaboration
3. Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.
8. Teachers spend considerable time planning together.
15. Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.
23. Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.
29. Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects.
33. Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.

Professional Development
1. Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.
9. Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.
16. Professional development is valued by the faculty.
24. Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.
30. The faculty values school improvement.

Unity of Purpose
5. Teachers support the mission of the school.
12. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.
19. Teachers understand the mission of the school.
27. The school mission statement reflects the values of the community.
31. Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school.

Collegial Support
4. Teachers trust each other.
10. Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.
17. Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.
25. Teachers work cooperatively in groups.

Learning Partnership
6. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.
13. Parents trust teachers' professional judgments.
21. Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.
35. Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage mentally in class and complete homework assignments.
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM MOBILE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 8, 2007

Dr. Harold Dodge  
Superintendent  
Mobile County Public Schools  
Mobile, AL

Dear Dr. Dodge:

Please consider this my request for permission to utilize the results from the School Culture Survey that was recently administered to elementary school teachers in the Mobile County Public School System. Also, please consider this my request to utilize the 2005-06 Alabama Reading and Math (ARMT) results of the elementary schools in Mobile County.

I would like to analyze the results of the surveys to determine the relationships among the factors of school culture and the Alabama Reading and Math (ARMT) scores in elementary schools. I would like to use the data as part of my dissertation research at the University of Southern Mississippi's Educational Leadership and Research Program. If this request is acceptable, please sign and date your acknowledgement at the bottom of this sheet.

I would be happy to share the results of my data analysis with the Mobile County Public School System. Thank you for your assistance. Please let me know if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Susan L. Smith  
Doctoral Student  
Department of Educational Leadership and Research

I grant Susan L. Smith permission to utilize the results of the School Culture Survey that was administered to elementary school teachers in the Mobile County Public School System. I also grant Susan L. Smith permission to use the 2005-06 ARMT results for elementary schools in the MCPSS district.

Superintendent or Designee  
Date
APPENDIX D

APPROVAL FROM INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 27040101
PROJECT TITLE: The Relationship Between School Culture and Student Achievement in a Large Urban School District
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 04/01/06 to 06/30/07
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Susan L. Smith
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & Research
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 04/01/07 to 03/30/08

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

5-9-2007

Date

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

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