

12-18-2023

Principals' Roles in Developing a Positive School Culture Through Communication and Building Relationships

Manakshi Panindranauth

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Panindranauth, Manakshi (2023) "Principals' Roles in Developing a Positive School Culture Through Communication and Building Relationships," *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62608/2164-1102.1144>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/ela/vol9/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Principals' Roles in Developing a Positive School Culture Through Communication and Building Relationships

Manakshi Panindranauth

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore high school principals' perceptions of how a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust assist educational leaders in improving the culture within their schools. Participants of this study included 15 high school principals in the New York City Department of Education's public schools. Data were captured through virtual interviews, where all participants were asked the same questions and analyzed through themes and codes. The three research questions that guided this study included how principals perceive creating a positive school culture by (a) improving the supportive environment; (b) improving strong family-community ties; and (c) building trust. The four themes that emerged from this study are relationships, communication, evidence, and challenges. Analyzing the principal's responses, a positive school culture is defined as developing authentic relationships through communication to support each other for one common purpose. This study adds to the body of research by defining how high school principals can influence a student's educational experiences, which are critical turning points leading to adulthood. Future research should include quantitative and qualitative studies to identify how accurately the NYC Annual School Survey relates to principals' perceptions. Further qualitative research should focus on the connection between central employees' perceptions of their role in school support versus principals' perceptions of how the central office supports them.

Introduction

A school must have a cultural identity or a shared vision for everyone within the organization to foster a positive school environment. Cultural identity is a compass to guide or realign the organization's direction when it strays from its beliefs (Adamy & Heinecke, 2005). Without a cultural identity, an organization will not grow, and for a school, effective leadership plays a crucial role in shaping, supporting, and reinforcing a positive culture. Huguet (2017) recognized school leadership as an essential component that influences the development and growth of a positive school environment. Aldridge and Fraser (2016) identified the school principal as having the most predominant role in developing a positive school culture, directly and indirectly.

For a positive school culture to exist, shared visions and goals must be communicated among staff members, creating a sense of motivation and commitment toward a school's objectives (Allen et al., 2015; Ohlson, 2009). Each principal can impact trust within the school's culture at all levels (Huguet, 2017). The principal's work, values, and actions must build trust and strengthen relationships with teachers, support staff, and administrators who directly impact a student's academic experience to collectively improve the educational environment (Roby, 2011; Teasley, 2017).

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which multiple audiences have widely accepted since its inception. Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs, a motivational theory pyramid comprising five tiers. The first tier of Maslow's hierarchy is the psychological stage, critical for survival, where individuals must meet this phase to function fully. The needs required in this period include food, air, sleep, and shelter. Once an individual's needs in the psychological phase are satisfied, they can move on to the second phase: safety. In the safety tier, an individual must feel physically, emotionally, and mentally

secure. Maslow indicated that people obtain a sense of safety when they experience a feeling of order in their environment. When individuals feel safe, they can move on to the third tier: feeling love and belonging. In this stage, Maslow explained the importance of feeling and reciprocating love to others. For example, in a school environment, this phase would include establishing relationships with teachers and feeling a sense of community for students and staff members within the school setting. The fourth tier in Maslow's hierarchy is esteem needs, which are achieved by feeling respected, seeing value in oneself and accomplishments, and respecting others. The fifth tier and the highest level of Maslow's pyramid is self-actualization, where individuals are aware of their abilities and engage in opportunities to grow. The educational system widely accepts Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As a result, they continue to develop initiatives to create safe and nurturing environments for students to have the foundation to achieve their full potential (Fisher & Crawford, 2020; Roby, 2011).

Statement of Problem

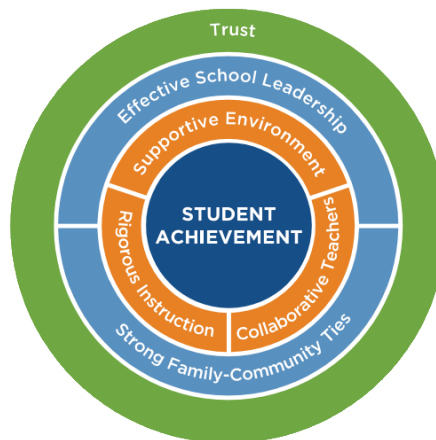
The problem addressed in this study is that when high school principals do not focus on building strong family-community ties, a supportive environment, and establishing trust, they do not foster a positive school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Huguet, 2017; NYC Department of Education, 2017). The principal has the most influence, directly and indirectly, on the school's culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Hollingworth et al., 2018; Huguet, 2017; Lemoine et al., 2014). However, principals focus mainly on classroom instruction and fail to see how education alone does not provide advancement and stability within school culture (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore high school principals' perceptions of how a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust assist educational leaders in improving the culture within their schools. The qualitative research method in this study focused on understanding the principals' perceptions of the social constructs within the Framework for Great Schools to improve school culture. Chancellor Farina designed the Framework for Great Schools to deliver school support to develop techniques that strengthen student achievement. The six elements of school improvement within this framework are rigorous instruction, a supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective school leadership, strong family-community ties, and trust (see Figure 1). These six components were the most indicative measures of success in student achievement and outcomes emanating from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which is interdependent (NYC Department of Education, 2017). The Framework for Great School's social constructs includes a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust, which informed the research questions of this study.

Figure 1

Framework for Great Schools



Since the research questions align with the Framework for Great Schools, virtual, semi-structured interviews were utilized to control the interview process on the principals' perceptions

of school culture. The purpose of conducting this study was to find identifiable experiences and strategies used to improve the elements within the social constructs of the Framework for Great Schools. Identifying these unique experiences through virtual, semi-structured interviews could provide valuable information to the educational learning community.

An average child spends approximately 20,000 hours in an educational environment for 12 years until they graduate and go on their next journey. The experiences in this setting help them grow academically and develop their self-image, personality, and social skills, contributing to their cognitive development (Zedan, 2010). Therefore, school culture is an essential element in supporting student's holistic development. Participants answered 18 interview questions in a 30–45-minute virtual interview aligned to the following three research questions:

1. What are principals' perceptions of creating a positive school culture by improving the supportive environment?
2. What are principals' perceptions of creating a positive school culture by improving strong family-community ties?
3. What are principals' perceptions of creating a positive school culture by building trust?

Introduction to the Methodology and Research Design

An examination of the social constructs of the Framework for Great Schools guided how high school principals created a positive school culture. A qualitative methodology is an in-depth look at real-life situations through people understanding their experiences, the influence their experiences have on their lives, and the purpose of those experiences (Mack et al., 2005; Merriam, 2009; Richards & Morse, 2013; Yin, 2009). The strength of qualitative methodology is the ability to show how individuals understand a phenomenon allowing them to provide a descriptive narrative (Mack et al., 2005). In addition, qualitative research captures insight by

discovering common patterns or themes that emerge through context rather than statistical interpretation of data (Creswell, 2013).

A phenomenological method in this study was used to analyze the meaning of lived experiences through the eyes of someone who has encountered the concept of a phenomenon through interviews and content analysis (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The creator of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, recommended using a phenomenological methodology to explore an experience objectively (Butler, 2016). A phenomenological approach was applied to understanding the essence of participants' perspectives through personable interactions and provided insights where knowledge of a phenomenon is limited. This approach focused on understanding the meaning of participants' thoughts, opinions, beliefs, assumptions, and values (Creswell, 2013, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The formative years of a student's high school experience equip them with the knowledge for adulthood. Past studies generated quantitative data to support the elements contributing to school culture and the student's middle school experience. However, qualitative studies must be conducted to provide evidence of the high school principals' roles in influencing school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Roby, 2011). This qualitative phenomenological study contributes to the existing literature by defining how high school principals can create a positive school culture to influence a student's journey.

Participants

The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) public school system is the largest school district in the United States. As of Fall 2020, the NYCDOE website data included 1,876 schools of various grade levels within the public school system, including 268 charter

schools (“DOE Data at a Glance,” 2022). Since this study recruited high school principals, 421 educational leaders were within this criterion.

Table 1

Participant’s Information and School Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Years in NYC DOE	Years as NYC DOE Principal	School Borough	2020-2021 Student Enrollment
Principal 01	Male	20	10	Queens	1271
Principal 02	Male	16	2.5	Queens	619
Principal 03	Male	28	4	Queens	458
Principal 04	Male	50	30	Queens	1645
Principal 05	Female	26	10	Queens	745
Principal 06	Male	29	16	Queens	654
Principal 07	Male	30	11	Queens	2335
Principal 08	Female	26	6	Brooklyn	277
Principal 09	Female	17	3.75	Queens	948
Principal 10	Female	20	12	Manhattan	375
Principal 11	Male	17	9	Bronx	464
Principal 12	Male	24	6	Brooklyn	400
Principal 13	Male	22	10	Queens	470
Principal 14	Male	16	3	Queens	2881
Principal 15	Male	29	3	Queens	3775

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling on Facebook with a sample size of 15 NYCDOE public high school principals. The Facebook groups utilized for recruitment were LI/DOE Aspiring School Building Leaders and the Center for Integrated Training and Education.

Snowball sampling was used to obtain additional participants for this study. After the principals were interviewed, they were requested to share the research flyer with potential candidates. Once the potential candidate showed interest in participating via email, additional information about the study was shared, such as the informed consent form and potential dates and times to schedule a virtual interview.

Procedures

Upon authorization from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Facebook groups were used to recruit potential participants, and they were asked to respond via the provided email address. When the principal responded via email, they received additional information. Each candidate received study information, answers to any questions, a request for potential dates and times for a virtual interview, and the interview questions.

Once participants confirmed a date for the virtual interview, they received an electronic copy of the consent form by email. All information regarding the participants was placed in individual electronic folders, such as informed consent forms, emails, interview recordings, and transcripts, and were stored confidentially. A pseudonym was developed for each participant, identifying the title and order of interest to partake in the study.

Member checking is an examination technique that can signify validity by having the interview participants confirm the themes and findings. Member checking was used to validate the authenticity of the qualitative outcomes by sending the final results to the study participants

and concluding whether they could confirm the validity of their responses. This process promoted credibility and reliability in the research study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Instrumentation

This qualitative study utilized interviews as the primary data collection instrument. According to Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007), the main goal of the interview in a phenomenological study is to acquire the participant's perceptions of an event by providing a detailed account of the phenomenon.

Field experts are a credible measuring tool to validate the data collection instrument. An expert panel was developed for field testing to establish the instrument's credibility, reliability, and accuracy. The expert panel consisted of three NYCDOE leaders who have a direct connection to school culture. These experts were assembled to review, refine, and ensure that the interview and research questions were aligned. The expert panel was used as a precaution against any bias. The field test was conducted to capture feedback to confirm that the interview process would be appropriate for the sample, including a clear understanding of the participant's interpretation of the interview questions.

Bracketing is the method of intentionally disregarding one's perception of a topic before and during a phenomenological study (Carpenter, 2015). A potential bias mitigated through bracketing for this study was having an inspiring, positive high school experience that ignited a passion for replicating similar opportunities for students. Bracketing was used during the entire study, from the beginning to the data analysis, while excluding personal experiences.

Data Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a “participant-oriented” approach that enables individuals to express their lived experiences accurately. Once all the interviews were completed, the data was compiled to identify trends, also known as themes, by using codes. Examples and quotes were used to support the participants’ points of view and articulate their perceptions.

Munhall (2012) described transferability as whether the results can be carried over to other comparable situations. Therefore, transferability was demonstrated through the participants' interpretations of school culture. Study participants’ expertise was aligned with the Framework for Great Schools' social constructs, allowing for transferability by other administrators to create a positive school culture.

Credibility indicates the level of truth of the findings captured from the participants and the researchers' analysis. This study used member checking to attain credibility. Dependability implies the stability of the findings over time in parallel situations. An expert panel and field test were used to achieve dependability. Confirmability demonstrates a researcher’s capacity to explain the participant’s perception and is not influenced by his or her bias. In this study, bracketing was used to achieve confirmability.

Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore high school principals' perceptions of how a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust assist educational leaders in improving the culture within their schools. Three research questions guided this study. The themes that emerged from research questions one, two, and three were (a) relationships; (b) communication; (c) evidence; and (d) challenges.

Definition of School Culture

Principals articulated their definitions of a positive school culture with vivid examples of their perceptions and pathways to create a common purpose to achieve that goal. Principal 11 highlighted, “A positive school culture looks and feels like real and authentic relationships between all members of the community.” Derived from the participant’s voice, a positive school culture develops authentic relationships through communication and collaboration for one common purpose.

Research Question One: What are Principals’ Perceptions of Creating a Positive School Culture by Improving the Supportive Environment?

A supportive environment is an educational setting where students feel safe, supported, and challenged (NYC Department of Education, 2017).

Theme 1: Relationships. Participants established that principals must create a safe environment through relationship building to foster a positive school culture. Having a student-centered school community is crucial to creating a positive educational environment. Students naturally gravitate to and establish relationships with adults that they think have their best interests in mind. As Principal 08 shared, “They [students] can come to us. They can come to you with just about any matter. We're going to listen and see which way [is] the best way to help.” Participants articulated that showing vulnerability, being visible to staff, setting expectations, and leading by example are essential elements of creating a positive school culture. Principal 07 stated, “I wouldn't ask anyone to do anything I wouldn't do myself; a supportive environment is where the individuals are supporting each other for the best interests of the students.” Principals must be in different spaces with diverse constituents to ascertain the environment to understand the whole child. Principal 10 mentioned, “I'm usually out in the hallways speaking to students and engaging with teachers. I always have an open-door policy to

be ready to hear questions, concerns, or problems from any one of the key stakeholders in the building.” Participating in these opportunities allows principals to ascertain their leadership effectiveness and monitor if the school is functioning at its highest potential.

Theme 2: Communication. An individual’s actions and behaviors directly relate to all school community members' values and are one of the most potent driving forces in decision-making. Principal 01 shared the importance of all decisions aligning with students’ needs. These choices include hiring school personnel and implementing a curriculum to educate and engage students. Participants stated that the fundamentals of creating a positive school culture comprise setting and communicating expectations for the school community. Principal 09 affirmed this concept, “Setting expectations for students is having those orientations, having a student handbook, and assemblies. How are we going to support you as you move from 9th through 12th [grade]?” To foster a supportive environment, principals must demonstrate flexibility. The participants mentioned the importance of listening to all stakeholders within the school community: students, teachers, staff, and families. Principal 02 enhanced this concept, “You have to listen and also make sure that people are heard. It's essential to make sure that you're putting action behind their needs rather than just listening and moving on with maybe the same original agenda.” All stakeholders must have a voice for the principal to capture each opinion and concern to improve the school culture.

Theme 3: Evidence. Principals must obtain qualitative and quantitative data from surveys and interviews to comprehensively measure the school environment. One way to analyze this assessment is by looking beyond standard measurement techniques, such as observing and listening to what is happening within the school community. Principal 01 stated, “If you have many kids complaining to you, then maybe there’s something you need to consider. If children

are thankful, happy, and acknowledging the things we're doing to make their lives better, then that works for me.” Therefore, principals must seek student feedback to embrace a positive school environment since they are the leading customers in the academic community. A high attendance and graduation rate is another indicator of a supportive educational environment. Principal 05 shared, “We look at the attendance rate. It is important to make sure that students are attending school. The next thing we look at is our graduation rate.” Graduation rates will not increase without an existing supportive environment.

Theme 4: Challenges. Participants noted the difficulties in establishing a supportive environment by explaining the influence of staff members' mindsets on the school community. Principals explained how the school's budget could impact its ability to function and provide the appropriate student services, which can require them to make difficult decisions to develop programs. Principal 06 expressed how budget cuts impede student success. He stated, “I went from four to three counselors, now, maybe to two. I never had a social worker before this year. How do you support a kid in crisis without a social worker or school psychiatrist?” Budget constraints require leaders to make difficult decisions to develop programs and distribute human resource capital. Additionally, participants recognized a communication disconnect between the central office and the school administration, limiting opportunities to provide feedback. Principal 13 reaffirmed, “The DOE is a barrier. There are many conflicting interests from different offices. Instead of spending hours on screeners, I would rather have that money to let my teachers plan stuff because we know our kids well.” A new chancellor is often chosen whenever there is a mayoral election. Each new chancellor has a different vision for the education system and would like all stakeholders to adapt to new policies without capturing feedback from school officials in the field, which causes a disconnect.

Research Question Two: What are Principals' Perceptions of Creating a Positive School Culture by Improving Strong Family-Community Ties?

Strong family-community ties are when school leadership builds relationships in the community by welcoming, encouraging, and developing partnerships with families, businesses, and community-based organizations (NYC Department of Education, 2017).

Theme 1: Communication. Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with families begins with communication, including interactions and participation. Principals mentioned the significance of ensuring parents have a voice and the ability to collaborate with families because the root cause of conflict is a lack of communication between both parties. Principal 12 stated, "Families see themselves as part of the community with people at the school they can talk to and trust. They feel that the school is going to care when they call and that they can come to the building." Communication is imperative to improve relationships between families and the school community. In addition, principals shared different modes of correspondence as an effective way to improve strong family-community ties. Principal 03 noted, "We have families that respond to emails. We have families that respond best to old-fashioned books, newsletters, and paper, where we write home every day. Our teachers communicate with families every day in some form or other." When administrators are clear, consistent, and transparent with their messages, they develop trust between the school and families. Once school leadership establishes solid communication, the foundations of improving strong family-community ties can begin.

Theme 2: Relationships. Participants shared the importance of building relationships with families to develop strong family-community ties. Creating parent opportunities increases their knowledge of how to support their children and become effective partners with the school.

Principal 09 affirmed, “We work with our families in terms of doing workshops on topics that the families feel like they need, from job readiness to immigration services, how to get health care, and the proper health care packages.” These opportunities allow schools to strengthen their partnerships with families. Discussions about strengthening the ties between the school, families, and the community should include all stakeholders' actions to contribute to student success.

Participants articulated their availability as vital to improving strong family-community ties.

Principal 02 stated, “If a parent calls the school, you want to get back to them promptly. You should celebrate achievements and not only reach out when there’s a problem. You must have that balance and investment in the whole child.” Principals who focus on continuously building connections form symbiotic relationships resulting in strong partnerships between the school, families, and the community.

Theme 3: Evidence. Participants attested to improving these relationships by monitoring the types of complaints and interactions they receive from families. For example, Principal 03 explained, “We don't get many parental complaints. We don't have many combative dynamics with our families.” Following up with families after they voice their concerns and recommendations is crucial to strengthening that relationship. Additionally, the amount of parent interaction with the school is another measure of strong family-community ties. Principal 01 articulated, “When we call home, do we get parents to pick up? And I would say 99% of the time, if we call home and we need to speak to a parent, we get that parent on the phone.” Parent interaction is vital to building positive relationships with families. Moreover, principals can use parent participation at events as a form of measuring strong family-community ties. Principal 13 shared, “We have something called student-led conferences. If parents come to that [event] and participate in the conferences, you know that's a good sign. That's a strong measure.” Monitoring

attendance at school events enables principals to reflect on parent participation to improve strong family-community ties.

Theme 4: Challenges. A general approach does not exist to promote strong family-community ties since each school's culture is unique. Educators will face numerous challenges because of the school's geographic location and the community's socioeconomic position, cultural background, immigration status, and family structures. Principal 14 shared an example, "Fifty years ago, most households had only one person working. Now we're in a world where both parents are working, and if there's only one parent, they might be working two or three jobs." Parents' priorities and struggles of making ends meet take precedence in their lives and create a hurdle for schools to improve these relationships. Therefore, based on priorities, parents must allocate their time efficiently to ensure their children are cared for. Principals explained the necessity of parents working several shifts in varying professions, impacting their priorities and the struggles to be financially stable. Principal 04 stated, "Because of the nature of our community, very often, our parents are still working in the evening or getting home late and are tired." Parents' employment responsibilities are barriers to improving strong family-community ties.

Research Question Three: What are Principals' Perceptions of Creating a Positive School Culture by Building Trust?

Trust is everyone working toward the shared goal of improving student outcomes by preparing students for success in school and beyond while maintaining respect for school staff, parents, students, and administrators who value each other (NYC Department of Education, 2017).

Theme 1: Communication. Open communication is a vital component of building trust. All stakeholders must understand the school's goals to support each other in cultivating a growth mindset by being honest and transparent while allocating time for all community members. Principal 13 confirmed, "Building trust is about being vulnerable, open, and honest with kids and teachers, and establishing firm boundaries of what's acceptable and what's not, in terms of how we treat each other and follow through." Telling the truth and being transparent while sharing the importance of following through on communication is an essential element of building trust. When individuals feel validated and have a voice, principals are empathetic and continue to enhance their school culture by providing genuine, fair feedback. Principal 03 mentioned, "Everything you do has got to look like you're being fair. Ultimately, you're doing what you're doing for the sake of the kids." The impact of fairness and the values aligned with fidelity is a crucial aspect of developing credible relationships. Additionally, participants shared the significance of allocating time appropriately to promote trust with all stakeholders. Principal 03 stated, "I'll get back in an appropriate amount of time. It's important to validate regardless of if it's an emergency or not. It's a trust that someone will be there to respond to you." Members of the school community feeling validated and having a voice enables principals to be empathetic and continue to positively enhance their school culture.

Theme 2: Relationships. Participants described safety as the ability to count on each other while being honest and open. For example, principal 07 expressed, "I [students] trust that you'll have the best interest in me. You'll look out for me. I'm going to do the same for you." School leaders must be honest and open with students to showcase their authenticity. Additionally, a safe environment is necessary to build trust, where employees feel physically secure to vocalize their professional opinions without repercussions. Principal 11 affirmed, "Trust looks like feeling okay

to have difficult conversations. People know they're still in a safe place where they can agree to disagree or have opposite viewpoints but still do it in a way that preserves dignity.” A trustworthy culture permits all personnel to feel safe and confident to converse with the principal and disagree with initiatives. This setting is where trust can begin to flourish.

Theme 3: Evidence. School-building leaders must continuously gather qualitative and quantitative data to gauge the level of trust within a school. Leaders can obtain a holistic view of the subject using a combination of evaluation techniques. Principals conveyed the importance of observations and having quality conversations with all stakeholders as a qualitative method to measure trust in different capacities and with diverse constituents. Principal 15 asserted, “You can hear it in the tone of questions. You can hear it in the way that people will write their emails.” The quality of the conversations impacts the development of relationships established through trust. Furthermore, an indirect measurement method is the interactions between students and teachers setting expectations that are naturally met through positive relationships. Principal 08 stated, “Just the observations, most of the time when I'm talking, I talk about kids. Watching those students' faces. The things that they will come and tell teachers, as well as to us.” Being present and observing what is happening in the school community is a significant measurement of trust.

Theme 4: Challenges. Participants mentioned the challenges they faced when preconceived notions played a role in forming an environment of trust due to negative prior experiences and the concept of individuals losing sight of the mission and goal by focusing on negativity. Principal 03 stated, “The barrier to building trust can be creating an environment in which people are not focused on the light. There's always going to be an element of unhappiness or people that are not in the place we want them to be professionally.” The concept of losing

sight of the mission and goal is a challenge combined with focusing on negativity. Additionally, one of the most significant hindrances discussed by the participants was a lack of communication between all stakeholders. Principal 05 acknowledged, “The barriers are when there's no communication system between the staff, the parents, and the students.” Conflicts with communication styles result in leaders being visible, present, and mindful of promises made to ensure they follow through with requests.

Limitations

Numerous limitations to this study existed. The first limitation was that due to the aftermath of COVID-19, health officials did not recommend in-person interviews. Therefore, all interviews were conducted on Zoom, which could have impacted the comfort level of the interviewee. Even though all the participants verbalized that they were comfortable during the interviews, interruptions and technological issues arose, which could have impacted responses. The second limitation was that some participants were principals in co-located buildings; their experience differed from principals in individual buildings. The third limitation was that participants of this study were leading schools with different student enrollments, which contributed to various experiences with school culture. Participants had a wide range of years of experience as principals; the senior participants had a richer understanding of tangible examples of school culture compared to newer principals.

Implications

The significance of this qualitative phenomenological study provided direct insight into lived experiences on principals' perceptions of a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust. This study aimed to explore high school principals' perceptions of how a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust assist educational leaders

in improving the culture within their schools, emphasizing the significance of their roles as pioneers in creating a positive school culture.

The results of this study can strengthen schools, districts, and central leaders' knowledge about principals' perceptions and roles in developing a positive school culture. This study can assist educators in recognizing, identifying, and replicating the best practices shared by principals to develop a favorable school environment. It adds to the body of research by providing a deeper understanding of what strategies and characteristics align with principals' approaches to creating a positive school culture. In addition, it adds to the literature on what principals perceive as lacking to support the social constructs and what additional resources are needed to improve these elements. The principals can identify challenges that inhibit growth within their school's culture. This new knowledge can equip and empower principals, their staff, and teachers to utilize the specific elements that work for their school, students, and their families. The principals can implement functional components, providing the necessary support for their schools to improve these elements.

State Level

This study highlighted the importance of creating a positive school culture and the elements contributing to achieving this goal. New York State policymakers should ensure that their school culture mandates and missions are aligned to provide appropriate funding to achieve their goals. Principals in this study stressed the importance of having adequate funding that provides the necessary resources to develop a positive school culture, which impacts a student's experience. Since school culture is different in every school and the needs of each school differ, this cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Principals should have the freedom to develop school-specific plans to improve the culture of their schools. They should have guidelines for the

designation of state funds and measurable goals. The development of a positive school culture should include principals having conversations with the school community to obtain a pulse of their school culture and to set goals to improve their educational atmosphere. Through collaboration with the school community, the principal should also develop and implement strategies to achieve those goals. In addition, they should create feedback loops to continuously measure all stakeholders' needs to move the school in the appropriate direction.

Central Level

This study emphasized the disconnect between employees at the education headquarters who create and implement initiatives in schools. Any central staff responsible for directly supporting schools should have bi-weekly assignments in the field to understand how a school building functions to ensure initiatives are practical to principals. Central employees should provide multiple frameworks to help principals figure out which model would best fit the needs of their schools to develop a positive school culture.

District Level

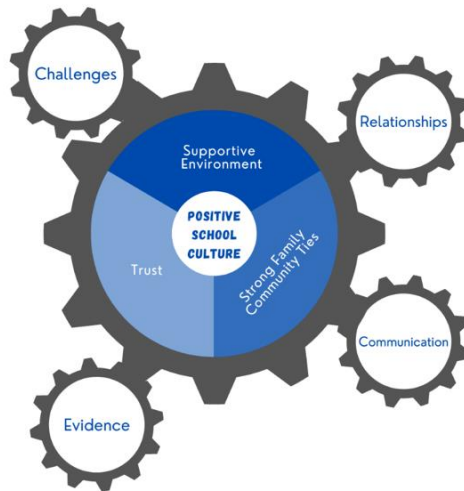
This study articulated how mandates and compliance are obstacles to focusing on developing a positive school culture. District leaders should provide the necessary tools to support principals in creating a positive school environment. These tools should include mandatory training on how school culture influences students' academic experience and performance. In addition, superintendents should provide opportunities for principals to have a voice and collaborate to create ownership of their building's culture. They need to have a voice by having the autonomy to speak with their community to understand their unique school culture. Therefore, the district office should create collaborative opportunities with principals to observe their unique culture and implement best practices to improve their schools.

School Level

The study revealed principals as the pioneers in cultivating a positive school culture because they can directly connect with all the stakeholders who influence a school's environment. As a result, they need to build the capacity to converse with the community about their desires of how a positive school culture should look and feel. Principals should also set up feedback loops to continuously gauge stakeholders' opinions to steer the school in the right direction.

Framework for Positive School Culture

The framework for positive school culture (see Figure 2) illustrates the core factors of developing a positive school culture, including a supportive environment, strong family community ties, and trust. These components are fluid and connected but necessary to create a positive school culture. These components can be enhanced through communication and relationships to alleviate challenges while simultaneously collecting evidence to measure success and implement interventions.

Figure 2*Framework for Positive School Culture****Recommendations for Practice***

To create a positive school culture by enhancing a supportive environment, principals should:

- ✓ Ensure students have safe spaces and be surrounded by adults who care about them.

Examples: Model behavior, be present in the hallways during passing, engage with students and staff, and be present in spaces with students: cafeteria, classrooms, school clubs, and meetings.

- ✓ Align their actions to the school's values while setting and communicating their expectations.

Examples: Be available for stakeholders to meet with principals. Host events to discuss expectations: student assemblies, staff meetings, and community information sessions.

To create a positive school culture by improving strong family community ties, principals should:

- ✓ Initiate different modes of communication with families.

Examples: Communicate through phone calls, text, social media, emails, backpack letters, and robocalls based on the needs of the school community.

- ✓ Create opportunities to incorporate parents' voices and develop their skills.

Examples: Conduct parent information sessions on how they can support their child at home, inviting families to participate in the school community: career day, principal's breakfast, chaperoning trips. Create opportunities to strengthen their skills: computer classes and CPR classes.

To create a positive school culture by building trust, principals should:

- ✓ Have a consistent line of open communication for stakeholders to feel validated.

Examples: Keep promises, follow through, and be consistent with communication.

- ✓ Be transparent and honest for stakeholders to express their thoughts.

Examples: Open door policy, being confident in one's abilities, and looking out for stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

The qualitative data from this study has shown that a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust are elements of a positive school culture, where relationships and communication are critical. Additionally, the data presented evidence of how principals measure their success and the challenges they find in creating a positive school culture.

However, the participants shared information that requires further study.

Recommendation One – Mixed Method

The first recommendation for future research is to perform a follow-up quantitative and qualitative investigation of the principals identified in this study to clarify how they performed on their NYC Annual School Survey. Additionally, a mixed-method study should be conducted to determine how accurately the NYC Annual School Survey connects to the principals' perceptions. Moreover, this study could provide insight into the connection between policymakers and school-based staff.

Recommendation Two – Central Employee's and Principal's Perception of School Support

The second recommendation for future research is to qualitatively study principals' perceptions of how central offices support them. This study should include central employees' views of how their support improves schools' and principals' insights. In addition, this study should focus on the importance of communication when developing policies.

Summary

The problem addressed in this study was how high school principals focus on building strong family community ties, a supportive environment, and establishing trust to foster a positive school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Huguet, 2017; NYC Department of Education, 2017). The principal impacts school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Huguet, 2017). They often become preoccupied with teaching and learning and neglect the elements required to advance and maintain a positive educational environment (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007).

The study results indicated that a supportive environment, strong family-community ties, and trust are necessary to foster a positive school culture. Throughout the interviews, participants revealed information that requires further qualitative and quantitative research. Mixed-method research should be conducted with principals to highlight the connection between policymakers and school-based staff. Additionally, a qualitative study with principals should be performed that focuses on the importance of communication when the central office is developing policies.

References

Adamy, P., & Heinecke, W. (2005). *The influence of organizational culture on technology integration in teacher education*. Learning & Technology Library (LearnTechLib).

<https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/26103/>

- Aldridge, J. M., & Fraser, B. J. (2016). Teachers' views of their school climate and its relationship with teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. *Learning Environments Research, 19*(2), 291–307. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-015-9198-x>
- Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L. (2015). Does leadership matter? Examining the relationship among transformational leadership, school climate, and student achievement. *The International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 10*(2), 1–22.
- Butler, J. L. (2016). *Rediscovering Husserl: Perspectives on the epoché and the reductions*. NSUWorks. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss11/8/>
- Cansoy, R., & Parlar, H. (2017). Examining the relationship between school culture and teacher leadership. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.15345/iojes.2017.02.001>
- Carpenter, D. (2015). School culture and leadership of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Educational Management, 29*(5), 682–694. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-04-2014-0046>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Third ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2016). 30 Essential skills for the qualitative researcher. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- DOE data at a glance. (2022). The New York City Department of Education. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>

- Fisher, M., & Crawford, B. (2020). "From school of crisis to distinguished." *The rural educator*, 41(1), 8–19. <https://doi.org/10.35608/ruraled.v41i1.831>
- Gentilucci, J. L., & Muto, C. C. (2007). Principals' influence on academic achievement: The Student Perspective. *NASSP Bulletin*, 91(3), 219–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636507303738>
- Hollingworth, L., Olsen, D., Asikin-Garmager, A., & Winn, K. M. (2018). Initiating conversations and opening doors: How principals establish a positive building culture to sustain school improvement efforts. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(6), 1014–1034. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217720461>
- Huguet, B. C. S. (2017). Effective leadership can positively impact school performance. *On the Horizon*, 25(2), 96–102
- Lemoine, P. A., McCormack, T. J., & Richardson, M. D. (2014). From managerial to instructional leadership: Barriers principals must overcome. *New Waves*, 17(1), 17-30.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, M. K., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide. Retrieved from <http://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Qualitative%20Research%20Methods%20-%20A%20Data%20Collector's%20Field%20Guide.pdf>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Munhall, P. (2012). *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective (5th ed.)*. Subury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.

NYC Department of Education. (2017, July 11). *Framework and school survey technical guide*.

Retrieved January 4, 2023, from <https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document->

[library/frameworkandschoolsurveyscoringtechnicalguide70216de6148c4003a8a3aaadd58dd63.pdf?sfvrsn=f21db7fd_2](https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/frameworkandschoolsurveyscoringtechnicalguide70216de6148c4003a8a3aaadd58dd63.pdf?sfvrsn=f21db7fd_2)

Ohlson, M. (2009). Examining instructional leadership: a study of school culture and teacher quality characteristics influencing student outcomes. *Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy*, 2(2), 102-113.

Perez, A. (2019). *An investigation of school principals' practices that promotes a culture of collaboration* (Publication No. 257546110) [Doctoral dissertation, The Sage Colleges]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Richards, L., & Morse, J. (2013). *Qualitative methods*. Sage

Roby, D. E. (2011). Teacher leaders impacting school culture. *Education (Chula Vista)*, 131(4), 782-790.

Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research*, 17(10), 1372-1380

Teasley, M. L. (2017). Organizational culture and schools: A call for leadership and collaboration, *Children & Schools*, 39(1), 3-6. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw048>

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research, design and methods*. SAGE Publications

Zedan, R. (2010). New dimensions in the classroom climate. *Learning Environments Research*, 13(1), 75–88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-009-9068-5>