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The Effects of Implementing Change on a Middle School Culture A First Year Principal's Journey

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by

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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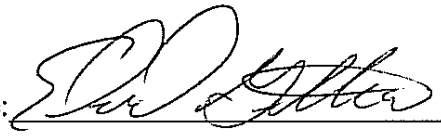
Signature:  Date: 9/20/12

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Abstract

This study is a first year principal's quest to transform the culture of Midwest Middle School (MMS). The study covers the 2009-2010 school year. The data from the 2008-2009 school year provided the baseline data for this study.

Alarming results of a state survey regarding the culture of the medium sized suburban middle school caused concern. The survey included responses from students, parents, and teachers specifically addressing building climate, safety, and efficacy. In four different categories, MMS finished in the first percentile response section. This translated to 99% of the students attending schools in the state responded more favorably to the select groups of questions than the students attending MMS. The survey results combined with the unremarkable academic achievement scores made it extremely clear that the school needed to change.

The principal of MMS, who also served as the researcher for this study, set out to transform the culture of the school. The intention was to create a ripple effect that would benefit academic achievement, behavior, and climate in the building.

The principal focused on data analysis and utilizing the data to inform instruction, implementing strict discipline consequences for inappropriate behavior while rewarding students exhibiting positive behavior and increasing opportunities to gain a greater sense of belonging. The researcher collected data over the course of the 2009-2010 school year. While the data showed little statistically significant differences in academic achievement, behavior, and building climate, the observable differences were remarkable.

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Chapter One: Overview

The single greatest challenge facing most professional organizations around the world is change leadership (Reeves, 2009). The topic of leading change in education has received considerable attention (Reeves, 2009; Fullan, 2008; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009; Schmoker, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009). The following study focused on a first year principal's journey in leading change in academic achievement, behavior, and the school climate at a suburban middle school. The principal served as the researcher for this study. The focus on academic achievement resulted from minimal growth on the state assessment (Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education [MODESE], 2009), and the focus on behavior resulted from an exorbitant number of discipline referrals during the 2008-2009 school year (SIS, 2009). The focus on the school climate resulted from alarming results of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) survey completed by the parents, staff, and students of the study school (MODESE, 2009).

Culture represents "deeply rooted traditions, values and beliefs" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3). The culture of a school informs the way things "get done" and more importantly "frames how change efforts are perceived" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3). The principal's challenge to improve academic achievement, behavior school climate and the necessary changes to do so was formidable.

Background of the Study

Throughout the 20th century, school principals were responsible for tending to the "core business" of managing a school (Kraus & Seashore Louis, 2009). Kraus and Seashore Louis (2009) contended, "By focusing attention on what occurred inside the

school, it was reasoned that school principals could manage the day-to-day events of the school in a manner that optimized learning" (p. 3). The prevailing thought was that if leadership successfully managed the daily operations of a school including discipline, budget, staffing, etc., students would automatically achieve at an optimal level.

Current research indicates that a school leader's role has shifted from maintenance task management to creating school cultures that are "innovative and adaptable" (Kraus & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3). Prior to the new era of school accountability, school leaders focused on the process of providing instruction in facts and skills. In today's schools, there is accountability for learning rather than teaching, "today schools are accountable for outcomes in the form of student progress" (Gordon, 2006, p. 5). At one time, teachers often commented that their responsibility was to teach the material and it was the student's responsibility to learn what had been taught. School districts are now scrutinized based on high stakes tests such as the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test. The accountability for the school/district results on this test is publicly reported in the form of a district/school report card (MODESE, 2009). The outcome of this report card is considered an indicator of the learning that has taken place in a particular school or district.

With this new standard of accountability, schools needed to make changes in the way they had always operated which translated into making changes in their school culture. The challenge of transforming a school's culture is a daunting task. A principal alone cannot control a school's culture. A building leader can, however, work to increase his or her influence over "behaviors, beliefs, relationships, and other complex dynamics present in the school" (Kraus & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 2). It is important for the

building leader to know that he or she has influence over the staff and teachers. Building administration can also influence the student climate in the building through their actions or inactions.

When schools struggle to meet academic, behavioral and/or climate expectations, the focus is on the leadership to make the necessary adjustments to improve the learning conditions. A leader must have influence in a building in order to lead change in a school's environment.

Statement of the Problem

Midwest Middle School (MMS) was the fictional name given to the school of study. The problem at MMS was that the school culture was not conducive to a positive learning environment. Contributing factors included low student achievement, lack of student discipline, and an overall negative climate in the building. Data from a recent state survey indicated that almost half of the students at MMS did not feel safe at school. Well over half the students did not feel a sense of belonging. A substantial number of students did not believe the teachers cared about them. The gap between academic achievement at MMS and the state expectations was widening (MODESE, 2009). To further add to the problems at MMS the discipline incidents had reached alarmingly high numbers (SIS, 2009) and results from two separate staff surveys indicated a negative climate accentuated by a staff disconnect with the students (Appendix A, B).

MMS was not alone in these challenges; many other schools faced similar situations. The research in education at that time had shifted attention away from building leaders serving as logistical or maintenance facilitators to being responsible for creating an "innovative and adaptable" culture of learning (Kruse & Seachore Louis,

2009, p. 3). The introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 forced educational leaders to shift their emphasis away from managing the operations of their schools to a focus on academic results. Student achievement results in the form of student outcomes versus the teacher's intentions were, and remain to be, the new focus in education (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Gordon, 2006; Muhammad, 2009).

In order for MMS to be successful, school leaders and the overall staff needed to be both reflective and analytical. The data was clearly indicating a need for change. For MMS to experience success, the leadership, staff, and students had to recognize the areas of need and accept the responsibility to research best practices related to addressing the deficiencies and ultimately embrace the necessary changes to improve the MMS culture as measured by student behavior, student academic achievement, and school climate.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to determine school improvements in the overall school culture as measured by student behavior, student achievement, and school climate. The building leadership made changes in the overall structure of how the school was managed from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. Details of the changes appear in later chapters.

Midwest Middle School was suffering from an unhealthy culture. The future success of MMS was dependent on the stakeholders' willingness to embrace change. Flat, and in some subgroups, downward trends in state test scores were concerning. Student disrespect resulting in substantially increased discipline referrals hampered the administration's ability to be instructional leaders. Student surveys indicated MMS was

not a school where the students felt safe or that teachers cared about them. Staff surveys revealed a disconnect between student and staff perceptions of the school climate.

The motivation for making these changes was to improve the culture at Midwest Middle School. The principal also served as the researcher for this study. The sources of measurement included secondary sources related to student achievement, student behavior, and student and staff building climate. Qualitative research data for this study included interviews with teachers and parents, various surveys, and a student focus group.

Research Question

The research question was "What, if any, relationship was there between the change in the school culture at Midwest Middle School from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year and the changes in the overall structure of how the school was managed?"

Sub question 1. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year affect student academic achievement?

Sub question 2. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year affect student behavior?

Sub question 3. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures during the 2009-2010 school year affect school climate?

The strategies for improving school culture implemented in the 2009-2010 school year included data analysis, intentional focused teacher collaboration, increased professional development, increased supervision, emphasis on school safety, student

input, focus on building better relationships between administration, students, parents and staff, bringing family activities to school, and increased celebrations including assemblies with a team emphasis.

Hypotheses

Null hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement as measured by the percentage of proficient scores on the MAP test.

Alternate hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be improvement in student academic achievement as measured by the percentage of proficient scores on the MAP test.

Null hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS.

Alternate hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be a difference in percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS.

Null hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in positive perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes.

Alternate hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be a difference in positive perception in comparing student responses in multiple timeframes.

Null hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in negative perception in comparing student responses in multiple timeframes.

Alternate hypothesis: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be a difference in negative perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes.

Importance of the Study

Midwest Middle School was suffering from an unhealthy culture. There is evidence that transforming a school culture from toxic to productive can substantially improve not only academic achievement, but the overall behavior and climate of the building (Muhammad, 2009). The future success of MMS was dependent on the stakeholder's willingness to embrace change. The information available to the public on the state department of education website provided compelling reasons to address the culture at MMS (MODESE, 2009). It was important for building leadership to introduce new research based processes and procedures with the intention of making a positive impact on the negative school culture.

Academic Concerns. Midwest Middle School, like many schools, was not keeping pace with Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In 2001, there was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). According to leading educational consultant Muhammad (2009), this legislation "requires that all students in America's public schools perform at a proficient level on each state's standardized assessment in reading and mathematics by 2014 or face sanctions" (p. 9). The bill requires all students attending a public school in America to be at a proficient level by 2014 in math and reading. The threat is that if students do not reach this level of competency, the school and/or district may face sanctions such as the loss of federal and state funding. Muhammad (2009) suggested, "The introduction of this legislation meant that for the first time in U.S. history, schools would be judged based upon student outcomes, not educator intentions" (p. 9).

MMS had not met AYP for four consecutive years (MODESE, 2009). The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) data showed little to no growth. The gap between numbers of students achieving the proficiency targets set by the state was consistently widening. Information taken from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (MODESE) website showed that MMS had not met AYP in Communication Arts or Mathematics in 2006, 2008, or 2009. In 2007, MMS met in the area of Communication Arts but not in Mathematics (MODESE, 2009) as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

MMS Entire Students Proficient

	2009			2008			2007		
	Prof.	Target	+/-	Prof.	Target	+/-	Prof.	Target	+/-
Com Arts	53.6	59.2	-5.6	49.1	51.0	-1.9	51.2	42.9	8.3
Math	46.1	54.1	-8.0	47.9	45.0	2.9	43.7	35.8	7.9

Note: From MODESE, 2009.

Even more alarming was the fact that certain subgroups were showing serious declines in proficiency. Special Education (SPED) students scoring proficient in Communication Arts actually declined from 20.6% in 2007 to 12.3% in 2008 and then again to 11.5% in 2009. In Mathematics, SPED students' scores fell from 23.5% proficiency in 2007 to 14.9% in 2008 to 10.7% in 2009 (MODESE, 2009). While the target scores set by the state continued to increase, the gap between the performance of SPED students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and the state target scores widened at an alarming rate. Table 2 reflects the concerning data specifically related to the Special Education subgroup in both Communication Arts and Math.

Table 2

MMS SPED Students Proficient

	2009			2008			2007		
	Prof.	Target	+/-	Prof.	Target	+/-	Prof.	Target	+/-
Com Arts	11.5	59.2	-47.7	12.3	51.0	-38.7	20.6	42.9	-22.3
Math	10.7	54.1	-43.4	14.9	45.0	-30.10	23.5	35.8	-12.3

Note: From MODESE, 2009.

Due to the inability to meet AYP, MMS was in its fourth year of improvement as designated by the state of Missouri. With NCLB expectations and possible sanctions looming, the stress levels at MMS reached an all-time high. The performance of the students needed to improve. The learning needed to improve. Something needed to change academically.

Behavior Concerns. Academics were not the only area in need of immediate attention. The second area targeted for change focused on the behavior of the students. In the 2008-2009 school year, MMS recorded 3,585 discipline referrals. In April of that year, the new principal met with the entire staff on their professional development half day. During that meeting, there was time set aside to hear the concerns of the staff. When they referenced discipline as a concern, the staff shared that they had simply stopped writing discipline referrals in the second semester of the 2008-2009 school year. They stated that it "was not worth their effort." Teachers expressed concerns with "out of control students" running the hallways causing disturbances, student-to-staff disrespect, and in many cases, student-on-student fights. Teachers shared that the level of overall respect for adults and authority had reached an all-time low.

One teacher, who was a member of one of the leadership teams, had the courage to make a very disturbing statement. She said that she would not allow her own children to attend MMS. Even more astounding the same teacher stated she would not recommend that anyone she cared about send their children to MMS due to the chaotic state of the school. As the future principal, and researcher of this study, scanned the room, there were several other faculty members nodding in agreement. The concern was that the environment at MMS was disrespectful, unsafe, and certainly not conducive to

learning. It was clear from the feedback in that meeting that MMS needed an aggressive plan to tackle discipline.

Teachers were not alone in regards to safety concerns at MMS. In the 2008-2009 school year, the new principal analyzed the public data. The principal's focus was the Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) survey data (MODESE, 2009). MODESE as part of the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) conducted this survey. The results of the 2008 AQ survey conducted by the state were alarming. Just 52% of the students surveyed responded positively to the question "I feel safe at school" placing MMS in the eighth percentile of state responses. Translated, that meant that 92% of the state middle level schools had a more favorable response.

The students also expressed a concern with classroom management. The student responses to the five questions addressing classroom management placed MMS in the first percentile of state responses. Translated, that meant that 99% of the state middle level schools had a more favorable response (MODESE, 2009). The same survey yielded substantial climate concerns.

Climate Concerns. In order for a school to be effective, students and staff must not only feel safe, students and staff must feel a sense of belonging, and students must believe that teachers care about them and their success (DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Lezotte, 1991). Along the same lines, teachers must believe that administration cares about them and their success (Gordon, 2006; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Whitaker & Zoul, 2008).

The AQ survey addressed the student's perceptions specifically regarding a safe and caring environment. The survey revealed that only 37.2% of the students gave a positive answer to the statement "In my school teachers care about me" with just 12.2%

strongly agreeing. Only 33.2% students agreed with the statement "There is a feeling of belonging at my school." This perception was a cause for concern.

The student responses in the AQ to a series of six questions designed to measure student climate (see Table 3) placed MMS in the first percentile in the state scoring lower that 99% of the middle level schools in the state (MODESE, 2009).

Table 3

Midwest Middle School Advanced Questionnaire

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel safe at school	19.1	33.1	28.5	11.4	7.9
In my school teachers care about me	12.2	25	36.7	14.8	11.2
There is a feeling of belonging at my school	14.9	18.3	31.1	16.9	18.8
My Opinion is valued by teachers and administrators	7.7	20.8	41.5	17	13
If a student has a problem, there are teachers who will listen and help	21.8	32.8	28.9	9.2	7.3
I like going to this school	16.6	28.5	26	13.5	15.3

Note: From MODESE, 2009.

The teacher's perception of administration's lack of support along with the student's belief that teachers did not care about them was a toxic combination. The data provided substantial evidence that MMS was in desperate need of a change in the building climate.

Definition of Terms

Action Research – A systematic inquiry into one's own practice (Johnson, 2008).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – Adequate progress from year-to-year that is on track for meeting the No Child Left Behind mandate that every publicly funded school's students be performing at or above proficient by the year 2014 (MODESE, 2010).

Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) Survey – A survey administered by school officials for the Missouri Department of Education for the purpose of gathering school data (MODESE, 2010).

Culture – Culture represents "deeply rooted traditions, values and beliefs" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3). The culture of a school informs the way things "get done" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3) and more importantly "frames how change efforts are perceived" (p. 3).

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) –This department is the governing body for public schools in the state of Missouri. This department sets policy, standards, and expectations for Missouri schools (MODESE, 2010).

Discipline Referral – Disciplinary action resulting from a violation of the student code of conduct (Canter, 2010).

Efficacy – The capacity for producing a desired effect or result. The effectiveness of a project and/or process (MODESE, 2010).

Formative assessments – An assessment for learning used to advance and not merely monitor each student's learning (Stiggins, 2002).

Missouri Assessment Program (M**AP) –** The state test administered to all Missouri students in grades three through eight (MODESE, 2010).

Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) – The state guidelines used for curriculum and school operations to rate effectiveness of schools (MODESE, 2010).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – A federal law enacted by Congress in 2001 stating that all students will be proficient in Math and Communication Arts, reading included, by 2014. Increasing standards are set each year and schools must show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to meet these standards (Muhammad, 2009).

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) – A three-tiered system wide intervention approach to improve school climate including, "positively stated purpose (and) clear expectations backed by specific rules" (Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007, p. 203) to encourage adherence and discourage violations.

Response to Intervention (RTI) – A model of intervention designed to meet the needs of all learners in both the academic and affective realm.

School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support system (SWPBIS) – A model of intervention designed to provide systematic and practical solutions for ensuring student success (Flannery, Guest, & Horner, 2010).

Stakeholders – Stakeholders are members of a school community that have a stake in the workings of the school including, but not limited to, staff, parents, students, and community members (Reeves, 2009).

Subgroups – Specific groups of students based on ethnicity, students that qualify for a free or reduced lunch (FRL), and students with disabilities that qualify for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (MODESE, 2010).

Limitations

In this study, the only students who were involved were the MMS seventh and eighth grade class over the two-year period. It is possible the views of this group of students could differ from the views of students who preceded them at MMS. The same is true with the parents involved in the interview process.

The principal/researcher works in the building thus posing a potential bias; however, quantitative achievement data consisted of standardized test scores, and school culture data was generated by a validated instrument used by the state. The subjective nature of dealing with discipline incidents and the resulting possibility of inconsistency presented a threat to the validity of the discipline data. While only two teachers were new to the building in the 2009-2010 school year, there was a potential threat that teachers behaved differently from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year due to the leadership change in the building.

An additional limitation was the inability to reach a larger sample size of the parent population. Time limitations and unavailability of the parent group caused the parent feedback to be limited.

Summary

Based on the feedback he received, it was obvious that the future principal had a great deal of work to do in his new role as the building leader of Midwest Middle School. Addressing academic achievement, behavior, and climate in his first year was going to be a significant undertaking. Serving as a high school assistant principal the previous eight years prepared him for many management type principal duties. However, the shift in the

role of the principal in the years leading up to his appointment created opportunities never before experienced. The new principal was anxious to accept the challenges at MMS. He was intent on focusing on shared decision-making based on research-backed evidence of effectiveness. It was his desire to have the faculty, staff, students, and parents involved in the process of transforming Midwest Middle School's culture. The principal committed to reviewing the gathering current information. Chapter 2 is a compilation of literature to aid the researcher/principal in the study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Change leadership is the most challenging obstacle facing professional organizations around the world (Reeves, 2009). The following research focused on leading change in the school setting. There is a plethora of research supporting the need for change leadership. The research not only calls for, but also provides, evidence-based strategies for implementing sustainable change (Fullan, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2009; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009; Reeves, 2009; Schmoker, 1999). In this chapter, the researcher explores the history of middle schools and the effects of change on a school culture. The researcher focused on literature addressing effective schools as measured by academic achievement, behavior, and climate.

Middle School History

Middle school is a relatively new concept in American education. In the 1970s, there were no middle schools. Junior high schools housed seventh, eighth, and ninth grades in over 5,000 schools (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). The middle school movement came 30 years later when junior highs only accounted for 689 schools while 8,371 schools participated in the middle school concept housing sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students in a separate building (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 80). The middle school teaming concept emerged with teachers and teams grouped into clusters. Team planning time built into the master schedule allowed teachers to collaborate and discuss specific needs of specific students. The focus shifted from competitive conference competitions to all-inclusive intermural activities with a focus on the experience verses the outcome. This was a substantial change in thinking. Change in any organization is difficult. Changing the way schools were structured was a daunting task.

Not everyone in education embraced the middle school model. The movement away from the junior high model inspired spirited debate about what was effective practice. One dissenting position came from Yecke (2003), the commissioner of Education for the state of Minnesota. Yecke believed that the movement towards middle schools was detrimental to the growth of schools and students and further asserted that the National Middle School Association (NMSA) had encouraged middle schools to "reduce rigor thus ultimately harming America's youth" (p. 84).

There were however, many middle schools experiencing success under the middle school model. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), many schools were breaking ranks by using researched-based strategies to lead school reform (NASSP, 2006). The supporters of the middle school model welcomed a change in the way teachers delivered information. The common thread among the leading middle schools was a mindset that was willing break away from the traditional ways of teaching. The most important characteristic of the successful schools was the willingness to embrace change.

Leading Change in Schools

Improving school culture calls for a change in existing culture. Change in any organization is difficult; leading change in a school setting is no exception. According to Fullan (2004a), "Change is a double edged sword. Its relentless pace is difficult to adjust to, yet when things are unsettled, we can find new ways to move ahead and create breakthroughs that are not possible in stagnant societies" (p. 1).

In the field of education, teachers, principals, and school district administrators have constantly looked for ways to improve learning. Fortunately or unfortunately, this

has prompted many new initiatives such as site-based management that subsequently inspired a myriad of strategies and concepts such as the essential elements of instruction. Educators have grown weary of the consistency of the inconsistent and short-lived initiatives (Schmoker, 1999). The problem was that these initiatives, while good intentioned and somewhat promising, "occurred in the near absence of any written or explicit intention to monitor, adjust, and thus palpably increase student learning or achievement" (p. 2).

Dr. Reeves (2009) believed that in order for substantive change to take place, the change agent must create the proper conditions for change. Dr. Reeves (2009) outlines the four imperatives of cultural change as defining what will not change, leadership actions, using the right tools for your system and relentless personal attention and "scut work" by the leader (p. 39). Educational leaders are constantly looking for new and innovative ways to improve their schools. Inevitably, this requires an open mind to change.

Unfortunately, leaders are very good at announcing change but are not as successful in setting aside the initiatives of the previous year (Reeves, 2009). The issue with educational change is that educational leaders continue to add additional initiatives without taking things off the teacher's plates. An example in the middle school setting might be mandating the use of formative common assessments without taking into account and/or compensating for the additional time to write the assessments. Several educational leaders use the analogy that leaders must "pull the weeds before planting a new garden" insinuating the challenges and practices of previous years be addressed at the onset. Dr. Reeves (2009) contends that the weeds need attention before, during and

after planting; therefore, to be successful, the weeding must take place before "the seeds of the new announcement have the slightest opportunity to take root" (p. 4).

In an article titled "Effective Schools: Past, Present and Future" (Lezotte, 2008), Dr. Lezotte (2008) draws an analogy of the expression "form ought to follow function" (p. 2). Lezotte used the example of an architect designing a project for a client. He defines function as the definition of what the client describes as the "aim or purpose to which the space is to be used" (p. 2). The architect takes that information and uses his or her background knowledge and experience to design a space meeting the needs of the client (form). There is also an expression that anytime a function of a system changes, its form changes as well. Thus if someone tries to change the function without modifying the existing form, the "old form will reclaim the mission every time" (p. 2). A common flaw of schools attempting to improve is that the function (new program) is constantly changing or modifying without regard for the form (overall structure). The result is that the old form reclaims the mission thus the nation has a stagnant education system.

An issue that is often contentious in schools is what some educators refer to as the flavor of the week mentality. The argument is that schools and districts routinely introduce new fads in education that seem to fade away a short time after the expert presenters have left and the rigors of the day-to-day operations cause everyone to revert back to their same old routines. Without a willingness to change the structure and commit to that change, the old form or structure will "reclaim the mission" (Lezotte, 2008 p. 2) or return to the same old ways of doing business. This pattern stifles growth.

Effective Schools. The works of Dr. Lezotte (1991) specifically addressed factors that contribute to making what he referred to as an effective school. Dr. Lezotte

published a checklist of what he believed to be the essentials or seven correlates of an effective school (Appendix C). Lezotte's seven correlates of an effective school have withstood the test of time.

Lezotte's (1991) seven correlates provided a guide to principals seeking an effective school model. Contained within the seven correlates are the three categories or main ideas. When comparing Lezotte's work with leading educational researchers including but not limited to DuFour (2002), Marzano (2010), Muhammad (2009) and Reeves (2009), several common themes reemerge regarding the characteristics of effective schools. The reoccurring themes include a safe environment, collaboration, a positive climate, a clear focused mission, and most importantly, motivated teachers in the classroom.

School improvement is not optional in the current academic climate. Schools must improve. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2011) has published a "Breaking Ranks" framework for helping schools improve learning. This publication stated "school culture must evolve from an adult-focused, activity-oriented school environment to a student – and learning-focused culture" (NASSP, 2011, p. 6). In 2003, the National Middle School Association (NMSA) defined what they believed to be the key elements of the middle school concept (NMSA, 2003). The report emphasized the developmental needs of young adolescents including both the social and academic needs (DuFour et al., 2010).

The same report cited eight key elements of a positive middle school culture. Courageous collaboration, a shared vision, a safe environment, high expectations for all stakeholders, engaged learning, adult advocates for each child and community

partnerships were all critical components of a successful middle school (p. 82). There is no shortage of literature addressing strategies for affecting learning (DuFour et al., 2010; Fullan, 2004; Marzano, 2007; Muhammad, 2009; Reeves, 2009). Respected researcher, Marzano (2007), addressed the importance of gathering and learning from data, providing focused and systematic professional development and delivering researched based instructional strategies for teachers. "Among elements such as a well-articulated curriculum and a safe and orderly environment, the one factor that surfaced as the single most influential component of an effective school is the individual teachers within that school" (p. 1).

Academic Achievement

Reeves (2006), Marzano (2007), DuFour and Eaker (1998), and Schmoker (1999) are at the forefront in educational leadership when academic achievement is the topic of debate. Cited on several points, the key elements of a successful middle school included the teacher in the room (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Marzano, 2007; Schmoker, 1999). The most important task for administrators was finding educators committed and prepared to work with adolescents, committed and prepared to work with the community, and ultimately committed and prepared to work in collaboration with each other.

The direct impact of collaboration on education is well-documented (Marzano, 2007; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Schmoker, 1999; Reeves, 2009). According to Schmoker (1999) "Teachers, like other professionals, perform more effectively - even exponentially so – if they collaborate" (p. 7). The issue is that true collaboration represents a change in how most teachers have worked. Even though there is evidence that schools are not

performing near their potential, there is equally strong evidence that schools can improve by striving for better results "by examining and refining the processes that most directly contribute to designated results" (p. 7).

In the book, *Leading Change in Your School*, Reeves (2009) addressed how to overcome what he refers to as the "seven popular myths" (p. 42). Reeves contended, "the most pervasive myth in change leadership is that planning – particularly complex, large-scale, and supposedly strategic planning – leads to effective change" (p. 42). In fact, research from his colleagues at the Leadership and Learning Center indicated that student proficiency was 20.7% higher in schools that did not emphasize a plan format (p. 43). Reeves is not a proponent of not preparing plans; however, he contended that schools should learn from those who keep their plans simple.

The practice of collaboration appears in most professional development literature. Reeves (2009) challenged the myth that people love to collaborate. Reeves cited the difference between congeniality and collegiality (p. 46). While he admitted that both are important to survive the stresses of the academic setting, he also was adamant that true collaboration was hard work. Reeves contended that true collaboration requires "time, practice and accountability" (p. 46). The focus on accountability is most important to meaningful collaboration. Reeves claimed that schools contending to be a Professional Learning Community (PLC) without embedded collaboration time in their schedule or schools with substantial time built into their schedules without accountability measures in place are engaging in "self-delusion" if they claim to be a PLC (p. 47). PLCs will be discussed later in this chapter.

Dr. Marzano is a renowned educational researcher known for his meta-analysis studies, which combines the results of a number of studies. This then determines the average effect of a given technique (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001). Marzano et al. (2001) defines an effect size as a unit of measurement that "expresses the increase or decrease in achievement of the experimental group" in standard deviation units (p. 4). The Marzano research lab is in the business of assisting school leaders improve their student achievement. According to Marzano (2007) a viable curriculum and a safe environment are important; however, "the one factor that surfaced as the single most influential component of an effective school is the individual teachers within that school" (p. 1). Marzano's research is clear regarding the importance of the teacher in the room (Marzano, 2007 p. 1).

Marzano (2007) cited the work of Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges (2004) when referring to the research behind the influence of the individual classroom teacher on student achievement. Marzano (2007) emphasized the extraordinary impact of an effective teacher versus an ineffective teacher citing a difference in achievement of over "one third standard deviation (0.35) in reading and almost half a standard deviation (.48) in mathematics" (p. 253). Marzano (2007) further supported his findings by pointing out that a student who has a teacher in the 75th percentile "in terms of pedagogical competence will outgain students who have a teacher at the 25th percentile by 14 percentile points in reading and 18 percentile points in mathematics" (p. 2). In his book *The Art and Science of Teaching*, Marzano (2007) focused on a comprehensive framework for effective instruction. He introduced and ultimately broke down teaching techniques and strategies that are statistically proven successful.

Professional Learning Communities. Hosts of dedicated educators who are passionate about transforming education join Marzano in the pursuit of inspiring school reform. In their book *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work*, DuFour and Eaker (1998) defined a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a place where "educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xxi). In the book *Learning by Doing* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006), a professional learning community is defined as "collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to the purpose of learning for all" (p. 3). Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.

According to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008), there are six key characteristics of a PLC (Appendix D). A clear mission and vision are at the core of a successful PLC. In simple terms, the mission or purpose accompanied by a clear direction, referred to as the vision, is essential. All stakeholders must be committed to the goals including timelines and targets. A commitment to the previously mentioned defines what is referred to as the "moral purpose and collective responsibility" of educators (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2008 p. 15).

The prevailing theme throughout this research is the need for dedicated and committed high quality teachers working together so that every student can learn. This effort accompanied by an organized and systematic way and/or process of doing business is vital to success. The most effective and ultimately highest performing middle schools "establish norms, structures, and organizational arrangements to support and sustain their

trajectory toward excellence" (Schools to Watch, 2012). Once the structure is in place allowing faculty to meet during common planning periods the next challenge is to insure constructive use of the time. As stated previously providing time is just the first step, using the time wisely is essential to success (Reeves, 2009).

The next three characteristics (Collective Inquiry, Action Orientation, and Commitment to Continuous Improvement) all go together. In their book *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour & Eaker, 2008), the authors defined the cycle of ongoing learning (Appendix E). Collective inquiry is the process by which educators work together to find best practices in reference to teaching and learning. Educators working in a PLC are action oriented. Members of the PLC move quickly to turn ideas into action. The commitment to continuous improvement is a PLC non-negotiable.

Freeport Intermediate School in Freeport Texas is a model school for doing whatever it takes to ensure that all students learn. Freeport proudly supports the PLC model of collaboration. Freeport was featured in the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) feature publication "Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Leading Middle School Reform" (NASSP, 2006). Principal Sale-Davis led Freeport from being an underperforming, unsafe place for children to a national award winning blue ribbon school. With a focus on seven key principles, the staff at Freeport turned their school around. According to Sale-Davis the key to success was collaboration, teacher leadership, building flexible schedules with a priority of teaming, mentoring teachers and students, interdisciplinary instruction and finally building strong community partnerships (NASSP, 2006, p. 219).

Student Behavior

Student behavior is a very sensitive subject in education. In a 2004 study underwritten by Common Good, a nonpartisan policy group focusing on legal issues in the United States, the serious nature of student discipline was addressed (Public Agenda, 2004). This study of over 725 middle and high school teachers and 600 middle and high school parents yielded alarming results. Ninety-seven percent of teachers surveyed and 78% of parents surveyed agreed that schools needed strong discipline and behavior policies to be academically successful (Public Agenda, 2004, p. 2). The study goes even further suggesting that academic achievement is only part of the school's responsibility. Ninety-three percent of teachers and 88% of parents believed the school's role is to "teach kids to follow rules so they are ready to join society" (Public Agenda, 2004, p. 8). The study suggested that the vast majority of teachers (85%) and parents (73%) believe that the school experience of most of the students suffer at the expense of a few chronic offenders (p. 2). Over a third of teachers (34%) have strongly considered leaving the profession and another 29 % have considered quitting because of disrespectful and disruptive student behavior (Public Agenda, 2004, p. 10). See Appendix F for the complete results.

A safe environment is absolutely an essential element to an effective school (Lezotte, 1991; Marzanno, 2003a; Canter, 2010). In order to secure a safe environment and just as important, an obvious appearance of a safe environment, schools must work together with staff, students, parents, and administration.

Stage and Quiroz (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of 99 studies regarding addressing discipline in schools. The study included 5,000 students and 200

experimental comparisons. The Stage and Quiroz study was a testament to the efficacy of disciplinary techniques. It was very interesting that the same study showed that the effects of clear and consistent discipline held strong across grade levels as well.

Marzano (2003) is well known and respected for his educational research in the area of student achievement; however, he also has contributed to research in the area of student and staff behavior. Marzano supported the research that classroom management is "arguably the foundation" of a high performing classroom teacher (p. 12). His work in the area of classroom management included a meta-analysis of the findings from over a 100 separate reports on the subject (p. 7). The results of his work yielded four factors affecting classroom management. The four factors are rules and procedures, disciplinary interventions, teacher-student relationships, and mental set (p. 8).

Marzano's (2003) study was very similar to the work of Stage and Quiraz (1997). Marzano (2003) looked at how the implementation of rules and procedures affected classroom disruptions (p. 8). He found equally convincing evidence that classroom management directly affects overall behavior and climate. He emphasized the importance of the actions and strategies of the classroom teacher in managing student behavior.

In his book *The Art and Science of Teaching*, Marzano (2007) cited another study by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) that builds a very strong case for the absolute necessity for good classroom management (Marzano, 2007, p.118). In this study, the researchers analyzed 86 chapters from annual research reviews, 44 handbook chapters, 20 government and commissioned reports, and 11 journal articles and as a result produced a list of 228 variables affecting student achievement. They asked 134 education experts to

rate the impact of each variable and classroom management was at the top of the list as a key element affecting student achievement.

Research supports the idea that any motivated teacher has the potential to reduce disruptive behavior in his or her classroom (Canter, 2010). Teachers who struggle with classroom management can learn to be effective managers. Canter (2010) provided a framework for struggling teachers (Appendix G) to gain control of their class (p. 6). The resounding evidence supports the need for behavior policies and procedures that support creating conditions conducive to maximizing the learning environment. Once such policies and procedures are in place, building a positive school climate becomes a reachable task.

School Climate

School climate has been the topic of research for over 100 years. The systematic study of the impact of school climate on student learning emerged with the work of Happen and Croft (1963). This work prompted more research and studies on school effectiveness (Anderson, 1982). In a recent study, the effect of school climate on student learning was analyzed (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). The findings of this study underscored the compelling evidence that school climate directly affects student learning, achievement, risk prevention, and teacher retention (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009, p. 187).

There are many definitions of school climate. No one definition is universally accepted. The differences in the researchers' views focus on the subjective verses the objective definitions. Cohen et al. (2009) suggested a definition of school climate as the "quality and character" of school life based on the "patterns of people's experiences of

school life" (p. 182). They further suggested that school climate reflects the "norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 182) of the school.

While there are many facets and components when debating the definition of school climate, the vast majority of researchers are in agreement that there are four main elements that shape a school's climate: safety, teaching and learning, relationships, environmental, and structural (Cohen, 2007). These "four essential dimensions" contain elements that address student behavior, academic achievement, relationships and overall structure (Cohen et al., 2009).

School Safety

Feeling safe socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically is a fundamental need. Research demonstrated a direct correlation between feeling safe at school and a healthy student-learning environment (Devine & Cohen, 2007).

The physical components of a positive school climate included examples such as a crisis plan, clearly communicated rules, consistency regarding response to rules violations, an overall feeling of safety by all, and the administration's, staff's and student's attitudes about violence (Cohen et al., 2009). Along with the physical components are the social emotional components that include student and the staff attitudes including individual differences, responses to bullying, conflict resolution, and belief in the school's rules. The elements include "teaching and learning, social and emotional ethical learning, professional development and leadership" (p. 184).

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is clearly one of the most important elements of a school climate. Without quality teaching and engaged learning, the discussion surrounding climate would be mute. The academic elements that make up the teaching and learning component include quality instruction; social, emotional and ethical learning; professional development; and leadership. Examples of quality instruction include high expectations for student achievement, honoring all learning styles, providing help when needed, linking learning to "real life", providing engaging materials, using a praise and reward system, giving all students opportunities to participate, and valuing creativity (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 184).

The social emotional and ethical learning element includes a focus on the concept of students possessing varied or multiple intelligences. Interdisciplinary connections are also valued in this element (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 184). Professional development is the measure used to support learning and continuous improvement. Research supports the need for a systematic and ongoing set of processes and procedures that tie data driven decision making to learning. It is important that teachers find the training relevant to the end goal of helping students learn. The key element of building leadership is belief that administration/ building leaders communicate a clear vision and are available to honor and support the staff (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 184).

Teacher Student Relationships

Building relationships that create an atmosphere of connectedness is vital to positive school climate. The elements included the following: respect for diversity, school community and collaboration, and building morale and connectedness (Cohen et

al., 2009, p. 184). Positive interactions between teachers, staff and students including teacher-teacher; teacher-student; student-student and administrator-everyone is a critical component for creating an environment conducive to maximal learning. Further contributors to climate supported by research include shared decision making both academically and behaviorally, students motivated to invest in their own learning and time during the academic day for teachers to plan.

A critical element of building an effective school is creating a welcoming environment for all stakeholders including students and their families in school decision making. Communication of expectations and norms including parent contributions and ultimate buy-in prior to the beginning of each year enriches the entire learning environment. Students and staff have a need and desire to feel good about their school and community. Outward enthusiasm combined with an open positive outlook displayed by staff is contagious to the students and community. When the staff is excited about their work, student engagement is more likely with a result of a more positive learning environment (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 184).

Conclusion

The culture at Midwest Middle School (MMS) was not conducive to a positive learning environment. Low student achievement, lack of student discipline, and an overall negative building climate contributed to the school's challenges. A review of the literature reveals a growing body of research that suggests the need for leading change in the management of schools (Fullan, 2008; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009; Reeves, 2009; NASSP, 2006). Recent research outlines the relationship between school climate and school improvement (Cohen et al., 2009). While implementing change is a daunting task,

it is necessary if schools desire to improve their overall culture. A school culture is a direct reflection of the school climate. The climate is a predictor of student behavior and overall academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to determine school improvements in the overall school culture as measured by student behavior, student achievement and school climate.

A school leader based on his or her authority cannot control a school's culture. A building leader can, however, have an effect on the culture by "increasing their influence over behaviors, beliefs, relationships, and other complex dynamics present in the school that are unpredictable" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 2). In order for change to occur, educators must be willing to deviate from traditional practices. Change is easier to talk about than implement. Leaders must be willing to set aside previous initiatives and ultimately create the proper conditions for change (Reeves, 2009).

The culture of a school is a direct reflection of the school climate. A review of the research suggests four major elements that make up a school climate (Cohen, 2007). A deliberate and intentional plan to address the four elements can influence the school climate and ultimately the overall school culture. The elements include the safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and structural/environmental aspects of the school (Cohen et al., 2009).

Leading change begins with building trust. With trust, an environment where all stakeholders feel valued supported and safe follows. The foundation of a positive climate is providing a safe school environment. It is clear that a comprehensive plan that includes specific processes to address violence prevention is essential for school improvement. There is a direct correlation between felling safe and student learning

(Marzano, 2003a). Transforming a school culture can lead to improved academic performance, behavior, and climate. Designing a plan that meets the needs of the specific challenges of select communities could yield meaningful insight on future endeavors. The result could lead to increased student and staff satisfaction.

Summary

A school culture is a direct reflection of the school climate. The climate is a predictor of student behavior and overall academic achievement. Based on this research the leadership at Midwest Middle School understood the challenges of transforming the school's culture. A systematic, deliberate, research based sustainable process was not in place. The task of implementing such a process, while daunting, was exciting. The leadership was anxious to get started. The following chapter details the journey through the 2009-2010 school year outlining the structural changes in the processes and procedures implemented at Midwest Middle School.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for four consecutive years and a widening achievement gap on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test were cause for concern for Midwest Middle School (MMS). The aforementioned, combined with alarming results from the 2008 Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) Survey conducted by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) provided substantial evidence that MMS needed to change. Based on the MSIP AQ, the culture at MMS was not conducive to a positive learning environment (MODESE, 2009).

Chapter 2 provided compelling evidence that the implementation of research-based processes and procedures could positively affect a school culture. The lack of well-defined expectations, the absence of clear processes and procedures and the poor academic performance on the MAP assessment (MODESE, 2009), provided clear evidence of the need for change. The data extracted from the MSIP survey combined with MAP assessment data prompted a decision to look into the implementation of research based processes and procedures to help change the direction of MMS.

Methodology Conceptual Framework

This study employed a mixed methods action research design. Action research is the process of studying a real school problem or situation (Johnson, 2008). According to Johnson (2008), there are five essential parts of action research: identify a problem, decide on what data should be collected and how, collect and analyze the data, create an action plan based on findings, share findings and plan for additional action with others (Johnson, 2008, p. 34). The goal is to gain understanding. According to action research,

author Johnson, “As an action researcher you are creating a series of snapshots in various forms and in various places to help us understand exactly what is going on” (Johnson, 2008, p. 31). The key to action research is using the knowledge gained to inspire change. The goal of the new principal at MMS was use the knowledge he gained through action research to inspire change.

Research Question

The research question that guided the work of this dissertation was “What, if any, relationship was there between the change in the school culture at Midwest Middle School from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year and the changes in the processes and procedures regarding how the school was managed?” Three sub-questions accompanied the research question.

Sub question 1. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year affect student academic achievement?

Sub question 2. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year affect student behavior?

Sub question 3. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures during the 2009-2010 school year affect school climate?

Hypotheses

Sub question 1. Null hypothesis: During implementation of new processes and procedures to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced-proficient scores on the MAP test.

Sub question 2. Null hypothesis: During implementation of new processes and procedures to improve school culture there will be no difference in behavior as measured by percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS.

Sub question 3. Null hypothesis: During implementation of new processes and procedures to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by positive perception in comparing responses to a Likert scale perception survey by students in multiple timeframes.

Sub question 4. Null hypothesis: During implementation of new processes and procedures to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by negative perception in comparing responses to a Likert scale perception survey by students in multiple timeframes.

The new processes and procedures for improving school culture implemented in the 2009-2010 school year included building better relationships between students and staff, increased supervision, deliberate attention to correcting inappropriate student behavior, student input, celebrations during assemblies for students, a team emphasis, data analysis, and intentional focused teacher collaboration including teacher celebrations.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable cited in the first sub question is the improvement in student success as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the MAP test during the 2009-2010 school year in comparison to the 2008-2009 MAP test results.

The dependent variable cited in the second sub question is the change in student behavior during the 2009-2010 school year as measured by percent of change in discipline referrals from the 2008-2009 school year. The data collected will compare quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS.

The dependent variable cited in the third sub question is the difference in climate as measured by positive perception reflected on student surveys in comparing responses in multiple timeframes. The data collected will compare positive answers to specific survey questions related to climate from the baseline 2008-2009 school year to the same survey questions answered in December of 2009 and then again in May of 2010.

Independent Variable

The independent variable in reference to all four sub questions is the changes in the processes and procedures and how the school is managed.

Population

The studied population consists of all seventh and eighth grade students in the study school. The student population in this study included all students attending Midwest Middle School (MMS) during the 2009-2010 school year. MMS was the single middle school in a small suburban district with a student population that consisted of approximately 700 students. MMS served all seventh and eighth grade students for the entire district with the fifth and sixth grade students attending the district's intermediate school.

The subgroups of the student population attending MMS consisted of White, African American, Hispanic, Free and Reduced Lunch, and IEP students. The

demographics of the building subgroups realized increases in three areas with decreases in two between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 (MODESE, 2010).

Table 4

Midwest Middle School Disaggregate Enrollment Changes

	2009	2010	% Change +/-
African American	12.4%	15.1%	+21.7%
Hispanic	5.8%	4.4%	-24.1%
Free and Reduced	32.6%	38.4%	+17.7%
IEP	16.1%	18.3%	+13.6%
White	80.9%	79.2%	-2.1%

Note: From MODESE, 2010.

The staff participating in this study consisted of teachers and support staff who worked at MMS in both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. The staff at MMS was a veteran teaching staff. Due to a reconfiguration in the district from two, sixth through eighth grade traditional middle schools to a fifth/sixth grade intermediate school and a seventh/eighth grade middle school that serviced all students in the district, some teachers were involuntarily placed at MMS two years prior to the beginning of this study.

The gap between academic achievement was widening as MMS failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the fourth year in mathematics and communication arts (MODESE, 2009). Two separate staff surveys indicated a negative climate accentuated by a staff disconnect with the students (School Survey, 2009; MODESE 2009).

Sample

The sample included all students attending seventh and eighth grade in the study district. The staff participants in the anonymous staff survey volunteered to participate. The student participants in the focus group activity included a random sample of students who no longer attended the study school. The principal/researcher secured permission to conduct the focus group at the district high school located in close proximity to the study school. The focus group consisted of a randomly chosen section of health class. The sample was representative of the overall population of the study school.

Procedures

Before the study began, a representative leadership group of staff members met with the principal to discuss the leadership transition. The meeting resulted in a clear message to the principal that trust in the building leadership and the overall direction of the school was less than positive. A series of meetings followed centering on implementing processes and procedures prior to the start of the school year.

Understanding that research supports building trust as an essential component to a successful experience (Gordon, 2006; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009; NASSP, 2011; Reeves, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2004), the principal set out to learn about his new staff. He developed an employee profile questionnaire that he sent to the staff prior to meeting with them (Appendix I). Leading researchers also emphasize the need for shared leadership and building capacity (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fullan, 2008; Marzano, 2010; Muhammad, 2009; Whitaker & Zoul, 2008). The final question in the profile sought feedback on advice for how their new leader could be successful.

In an effort to gain the staff's perspective, the staff completed a three-question survey outlining the good, the bad, and the ugly at MMS. The results from the survey (Appendix B) led to a staff vote on the most critical issues facing MMS (Appendix I) that ultimately resulted in the staff developing collective commitments (Appendix J).

The background information gathered by the principal provided valuable insight on the selection of the survey questions chosen for this study. The 10 questions extracted from the Advanced Questionnaire administered by the Missouri Department of Education (MODESE, 2009) included questions based around behavior, academic achievement and climate (Appendix K). Students and staff responded to the 10 questions. The staff responded from the student's perspective. The responses provided valuable quantitative data for this study.

Additional open-ended questions provided to students and staff provided valuable qualitative data for this study (Appendix L). The open-ended questions included feedback on student and staff perceptions of the impact on MMS based on the changes in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year.

Instrumentation

MAP. The MAP data collected from the state website (MODESE, 2009) provided the information for identifying students not meeting the state standard of proficient or advanced-proficient on the state assessment in communication arts and mathematics. The data covered the 2008-2009 school year and the 2009-2010 school year. Analysis of data included a comparison of the percent of MMS students who scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range in communication arts and mathematics during the 2008-2009 school year to the students who scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range

during the 2009-2010 school year. The MAP data provided a portion of the evidence for addressing the academic achievement sub question of this study.

The validity of the MAP reports developed by CTB/McGraw-Hill address best practices of the testing industry including standards set by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2010, p. 117).

The reliability of raw scores on the MAP tests was evaluated using Cronback's (1951) coefficient alpha, which is a lower-bound estimate of test reliability (Cronback, 1951, p. 132).

> The reliability coefficient is a ratio of the variance of true test scores to those of the observed scores, with the values ranging from 0 – 1. The closer the value of the reliability coefficient is to 1, the more consistent the scores, where 1 refers to a perfectly consistent test. (Cronback, 1951, p. 133)

In general, reliability coefficients that are equal to or greater than 0.8 are considered acceptable for test of moderate lengths. The overall reliability of the seventh and eighth grade Communication Arts was 0.91 indicating acceptable reliability (Cronback, 1951, p. 142). The overall reliability of seventh grade Math was 0.92 while eighth grade scored 0.93 indicating acceptable reliability (p. 142). The correlation coefficients suggested that individual student scores for Communication Arts, Mathematics, and Science are moderately to highly rated (pp. 149-151).

Thirty-five fewer students took the MAP test during the 2009-2010 school year. Academic achievement results in Communication Arts revealed a slight decrease of .9% from one year to the next. The greater concern for MMS was the widening gap of the

state target. The state set a target in Communication Arts of 67.4%. In one year, the gap between the state target and the building score more than doubled from -5.6% to -14.7%.

From 2009 to 2010, academic achievement results in Mathematics increased by 4.9%; however, the state target in Mathematics was 63.3%. The 51% score represented a -12.3% difference in the MMS achievement level and the state target.

Table 5

Midwest Middle MAP Comparisons

	2009			2010		
	Prof.	Target	+/-	Prof.	Target	+/-
Com Arts	53.6	59.2	-5.6	52.7	67.4	-14.7
Math	46.1	54.1	-8.0	51.0	63.3	-12.3

Note: From MODESE, 2010.

Upon review of the data, the challenges for MMS mirrored the challenges presented to most schools falling short of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) targets. The state's expectation for growth in Communication Arts was 8.2% and in Mathematics was 9.2%. The negative trend resulting from flat MAP results in Communication Arts and a slight gain of 4.9% in Mathematics presented a cause for concern for the leadership of MMS.

MSIP AQ Survey. The Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) Survey results for Midwest Middle School as reported through MODESE included parent, student, and teacher responses indicating if the survey participant strongly agreed, agreed, was neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the

statements. The results provided a baseline for discipline, academic achievement, and climate concerns (MOSESE, 2009).

The state of Missouri administers the Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) survey once every five years. The state administers the questionnaire the semester prior to the Missouri School Improvement Review. The AQ survey gives all stakeholders a voice in the review process. The AQ consists of six different questionnaires including Elementary Student Questionnaires (Grades 3-5), Mid-Level Questionnaires (Grades 6-8), Secondary Student Questionnaires (Grades 9-12), Parents (one for each student), Certified Faculty, Support Staff, and members of the District Board of Education. The state administers the questionnaires online with the exception of the traditional paper form provided to the parents (MODESE, 2009). For the purposes of this study, the principal extracted the Mid-Level Questionnaires (Grades 6-8) data.

Student Surveys. The student multiple-choice surveys included questions extracted from the AQ survey. The chosen questions referenced the students' views the areas of school climate, discipline, and academic achievement. The principal extracted questions from the AQ survey specifically related to climate and gave the replicated survey to MMS students. The data was analyzed specific to these questions.

Table 6

MSIP Survey Results - Fall 2008

	MSIP AQ Questions related to Climate
1	There is a feeling of belonging at my school.
2	I feel safe at school.
3	I like going to this school.
4	My opinion is valued by teachers and administrators.
5	Teachers in my school really care about me.
6	If a student has a problem there are teachers who will listen and help.

Note: From MODESE, 2009.

MODESE elaborates on the reasoning behind the methodology of reporting data specific to the AQ.

> The primary method of reporting AQ results for the MSIP AQ Report was to use additive scales. With this approach, questions that addressed different aspects of very similar topics, such as School Climate, or Teacher Effectiveness were sometimes statistically combined into a single School Climate Scale, or Teacher Effectiveness Scale. The scales or themes identified were cited in research as important elements that have an effect on student performance. These scales and their items were selected after carefully examining the statistical properties of each individual scale. An advantage of the use of additive scales is that the scales provide a higher degree of reliability than indicators constructed from single items. In the case of the fourth cycle AQ, all additive scales that are reported in this document were determined to have a Chronbach's Alpha of .68 or higher.

> These scales had a potential range of from one to five, where a value of one would be unanimous strong disagreement or never, and a value of five would be unanimous strong agreement or regularly. The mean value for the scale was reported, along with the number of responses upon which it was based. (MODESE, 2009, p. 48)

The student survey completed by the MMS students in the Fall of 2009 and then again in the Spring of 2010 included four questions taken from the six climate questions in the AQ survey. The differences in the surveys represented the differences in student perceptions during the school year with new processes and procedures in place. The principal analyzed two sets of data. The first set included students who answered in the affirmative (agree or strongly agree) and the second set included students who answered in the negative (disagree or strongly disagree). The neutral responses were not included in either set of data analysis. The principal focused on affirmative and negative answers.

The selected questions from the AQ survey administered to the MMS students provided the quantitative data to determine improvement from the student's point of view. The data analysis provided the necessary information whether to reject the null hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by positive perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes."

The baseline for the selected questions originated from the 2008 AQ survey. The 615 students responding from MMS school reported a mean score of 3.24 on the School Climate scale, which placed it at the first percentile, scoring lower than 99% of mid-level

schools in the state (MODESE, 2009). Subsequent surveys in the Fall of 2009 and then again in the Spring of 2010 yielded the following results.

Table 7

MSIP Survey Results - Fall 2008

Student who answered positively (agree or strongly agree)
MSIP AQ Questions related to Climate

	Fall 2008 n=607	%	Fall 2009 n = 603	%	Spring 2010 n=480	%
I feel safe at school.	317	52	402	67	312	65
I like going to this school.	274	45	366	61	237	49
My opinion is valued by teachers and administrators.	173	29	354	59	259	54
Teachers in my school really care about me.	226	37	376	62	293	61

Note: From MODESE, 2010.

The data analysis also provided the necessary information whether to reject the null hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by negative perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes."

Table 8

MSIP AQ Questions Related to Climate

Student who answered negatively (disagree or strongly disagree)
MSIP AQ Questions related to Climate

	Fall 2008 n=607	%	Fall 2009 n = 603	%	Spring 2010 n=480	%
I feel safe at school.	117	.19	66	.11	54	.11
I like going to this school.	176	.29	101	.17	107	.22
My opinion is valued by teachers and administrators.	182	.30	70	.12	60	.13
Teachers in my school really care about me.	158	.26	70	.12	58	.12

Note: From MODESE, 2010.

The analysis of the negative perception was important due to the large proportion of neutral responses to the survey. Students who felt strongly one way or another responded to the positive or to the negative.

Student Focus Group. The student focus group included interviewing a purposeful sample of students who attended MMS in both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. The focus group included questions relating to the students' perception of the impact on the schools culture based on the implementation of the new processes and procedures (Appendix L).

Staff Surveys. The staff multiple-choice survey included questions extracted from the AQ survey. The staff survey mirrored the student survey. The chosen questions referenced the staff's beliefs of the students' views in the areas of school climate, discipline, and academic achievement. The staff was directed to answer the 10-question

survey concerning how they believed the MMS students would answer the questions. The purpose was to get the staff's perception of the students' perspective.

Table 9

Midwest Middle School Teacher vs. Student Perception

Questions taken from AQ survey % positive responses Strongly Agree and Agree	Teacher's Perceptions	Student's Actual Answers
My Opinion is valued by teachers and administrators	63%	28.50%
During our classes we stay focused on learning and don't waste time	60%	25.20%
Differences among students and their families are respected in this school	67%	25.20%
Teachers in this school really care about me	82.30%	37.20%
There is good communication between teachers and students	67.40%	33.80%
I feel safe at school	60.90%	52.20%
I like going to this school	70.10%	45.10%
Discipline is handled fairly in my school	26.10%	41.30%
Most of my teachers respond to disruptive students quickly and effectively	56.50%	50.90%
I can do well in school	91.30%	83.40%

Note: From MODESE, 2009 and MMS teacher survey, 2009.

The staff open-ended survey included questions relating to the staff perception of the impact on the school's culture based on the implementation of the new processes and procedures (Appendix L).

Parent Survey. The parent open-ended survey consisted of questions referencing the parents' views of the impact on the school's culture based on the changes to processes and procedures during the 2009-2010 school year (Appendix M).

Data Collection

The data collected for this study was secondary in nature. The Superintendent of MMS district granted permission to use secondary district data collected as part of the data analysis process required in the school's improvement plan. Discipline and survey data used for the 2010 School Improvement Plan provided a source of data for this study. The principal collected aggregate and disaggregate MAP data as well as survey data from MODESE.

The school's student information system provided the data directly related to discipline covering the 2008-2009 school year and the 2009-2010 school year. A collection of aggregate and disaggregate data provided a portion of the evidence for addressing the behavior sub-question of this study. The Superintendent of MMS district granted permission to use secondary district discipline data collected as part of the data analysis process required in the school's improvement plan.

MODESE administered the Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) Survey to all stakeholders in the MMS district during the Fall of 2008. MODESE administers the AQ survey once every five years in the semester prior to a Missouri School Improvement (MSIP) Review. Data from the 2008 AQ survey published in January of 2009 yielded alarming results (MODESE, 2009). The AQ survey grouped questions placing them into specific categories (Appendix N). Students, parents, and faculty responded to the questions. In three student response categories including climate, classroom management and efficacy and expectations (Appendix O), MMS scored lower than 99% of mid-level schools in the state (p. 15-24).

The survey revealed that almost half of the student's at MMS did not feel safe at school, which translated into a score that was 92% lower than all mid-level schools in the state (MODESE, 2009, p. 36). Well over half the students did not feel a sense of belonging. A significant number of students did not believe the teachers cared about them. The research is clear that school safety and students sense of belonging is essential to a successful school (Gordon, 2006; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Whitaker & Zoul, 2008; Lezotte, 1991; Marzanno, 2003a).

The survey data extracted from the AQ provided the data directly related to climate, efficacy, and safety. The advanced questionnaire administered in the Fall of 2008 and published in January of 2009 provided a portion of the evidence for addressing all three sub questions of this study (MODESE, 2009). The questions extracted from the survey were Likert-Type Scale questions. This type of question provides the respondent with five choices. The choices for the selected questions included: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, or Strongly Agree.

The method of reporting the AQ results was to use additive scales (p. 46). This approach uses a series of questions that address very similar topics to address themes such as school climate or teacher effectiveness. The purpose of using additive scales is that there is a higher degree of reliability than just single item questions. In the fourth cycle AQ it was determined that the scales in the document had a Chronback's Alpha of .68 or higher. The mean value was reported as well as the number of responses in which the mean value was determined (MODESE, 2009, p. 46).

A staff survey completed in the spring of 2009 comparing the AQ actual results to the staff's perceptions on 10 extracted questions provided a portion of the evidence for

addressing the climate sub-question of this study. The principal took 10 questions from the survey related to behavior, climate, and student achievement concerns. He created his own survey containing these questions and sent it out to his staff. He directed the staff to answer the questions how they believed the students would answer the questions. The staff had not reviewed the results of the 2008 AQ survey thus their answers were truly the staff's perception of the student's current reality. The purpose of this exercise was to gain information on the differences between the staff's perception of how the students were thinking and the student's actual answers (Appendix K). Additional surveys administered to the students over the same questions in the Fall of 2009 and again in the Spring of 2010 in accordance with the building's school improvement plan provided a portion of the evidence for addressing the climate sub question of this study.

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted to gain insights on how students perceived the effects of the changes in policies and procedures on the school culture from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school years. The principal conducted the interviews during the 2010-2011 school year. The group consisted of a diverse purposeful sample. The students interviewed were a random sample of ninth grade students who had attended MMS in both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. The principal secured appropriate permissions for all interviews using a student agreement and parent consent form. The principal traveled to the student's high school. The participating students received donuts for their participation.

A group of 11 random teachers completed an open-ended questionnaire referencing the culture of the building during the 2008-2009 and the 2009-2010 school

years (Appendix L). The 11 teachers represented 20% of the MMS staff that taught in both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. Teachers who completed the questionnaire did so with a guarantee of anonymity. By completing the questionnaire, the teachers granted permission to use the results in this study.

Parent interviews consisted of telephone conversations with a purposeful sample of parents who had children who attended MMS prior to and again during the 2009-2010 school year.

Data Analysis

The principal extracted data for hypothesis #1 from public information provided the MODESE website. A quantitative data analysis was used to determine whether to reject the null hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the MAP test" or support the alternative hypothesis. A *z*-test for differences in proportions was applied to determine the level of change in student MAP scores from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. In addition, a *z*-test for difference in proportions was applied to subgroups including Black, Individual Education Plan (IEP), and Free and Reduced Lunch populations.

The data gathered for hypothesis #2 was taken from the school district student information system. A quantitative data analysis was used to determine whether to reject the null hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and

OSS" or support the alternative hypothesis. ANOVA - single factor tests were used to determine the level of change in student behavior as reported through the district's student data management system.

The principal observed notable differences in the discipline data. With the exception of the first and second quarter In-School Suspension numbers, the discipline for MMS declined in every quarter in every category. The principal noted a significant drop in the overall discipline for the third quarter. While a 65% reduction in overall discipline referrals is noteworthy, a decreased number of attendance days due to extreme weather conditions limited equitable reporting thus posing a threat to the reliability of the third quarter data. The semester data in Table 10 provided a more accurate depiction of the overall change in discipline referrals.

Table 10

Midwest Middle School Discipline Results by Semester

	Semester 1	Semester 2	Totals
08.09 Total	1564	1919	3483
09.10 Total	1140	950	2090
08.09 ISS	162	295	457
09.10 ISS	275	257	532
08.09 OSS	105	137	242
09.10 OSS	105	105	210

Note: From Midwest Middle School SIS, 2010.

During the first semester of the 2009-2010 school year, MMS recorded a 27% reduction in discipline referrals. Discipline referrals dropped from 1,564 overall referrals

to 1,140 overall referrals. During the second semester of that same year MMS recorded a 50% reduction in discipline referrals. Discipline referrals notably dropped from 1,919 to 950.

The principal gathered data for hypothesis #3 from the MODESE AQ survey and the school administered student surveys. A quantitative data analysis was used to determine whether to reject the null hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in positive perception in comparing responses to a Likert scale perception survey by students in multiple timeframes" or support the alternative hypothesis. The researcher compiled data from the Likert-scale survey into the number of responses to Agree and Strongly Agree to statements concerning climate. Frequencies were converted into percentages. A single factor ANOVA was applied to data.

The principal gathered data for hypothesis #4 from the MODESE AQ survey and the school administered student surveys. A quantitative data analysis was used to determine whether to reject the null hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in negative perception in comparing responses to a Likert scale perception survey by students in multiple timeframes" or support the alternative hypothesis. The analysis of the negative perception was important due to the large proportion of neutral responses to the survey statements. Students who felt strongly one way or another responded accordingly.

Academic Achievement Data. An analysis of the academic achievement data measured the increase and/or decrease in the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced proficient on the MAP test from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010

school year. ANOVA was applied to determine the level of change in student MAP scores from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year.

Discipline Data. An analysis of the discipline data measured the increase and/or decrease from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. Both the principal and the assistant principal assigned discipline consequences. Aggregate and disaggregate data were analyzed. Overall discipline, in-school suspensions, and out of school suspensions were tracked. ANOVA - single factor tests were used to determine the level of change in student behavior as reported through the district's student data management system.

School Survey Data. The school survey included questions extracted from the MSIP, AQ survey specifically related to academic achievement, behavior, and climate. The principal used this survey a number of times as part of the school's improvement plan. The student responses to the 10 questions from the 2008 AQ survey served as the baseline. The student responses to the same survey in the Fall of 2009 and then again in the Spring of 2010 provided the data for analysis. *T* tests for difference in means – assuming equal variances were used to determine the level of change in the positive and/or negative perception in comparing student responses in multiple timeframes. The Excel data analysis feature was used to calculate the test score.

Staff Questionnaire. The principal/researcher sent an open-ended questionnaire to all teachers and recorded the results. This survey was voluntary. The survey contained eight questions related to the staff member's perception of culture at MMS prior to and proceeding the changes in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-

2010 school year. The results provided data for meaningful staff discussions (Appendix L).

Assumptions

The principal/researcher assumed that improving academic achievement, student behavior, and building climate would always be a goal of Midwest Middle School. The principal/researcher assumed that all the participants in the study would answer the survey, focus group, and interview questions probably answered the questions truthfully due to the confidentiality and anonymity measures the researcher put into place. The researcher included the option of withdrawal at any time as another measure to protect the participants. The researcher assumed the sample population chosen to participate in the study was representative of the total population.

Limitations

In this study, the only students who were involved were the seventh and eighth grade class over the two-year period. It is possible the views of this group of students could differ from the views of students who preceded them at Midwest Middle School. The same is true with the parents involved in the interview process.

While only two teachers were new to the building in the 2009-2010 school year, there was a potential threat that teachers behaved differently from the 2008-2008 school year to the 2009-2010 school year due to the leadership change in the building.

An additional limitation was the inability to reach a larger sample size of the parent population. Time limitations and unavailability of the parent group caused the parent feedback to be limited.

Additional limitations included instrumentation limitations, threats of mortality, history, and bias. The consistency of the implementation of new processes and procedures particularly in the area of administering discipline limited the findings.

Mortality and History Threat. MMS is just a two-year school. The students have a limited time to learn new processes and procedures and each year a complete grade level representing approximately 50% of the student population moves in to seventh grade and out to high school. The transient nature of the short duration poses a mortality threat.

The assistant principal's duty involves a disproportionate time dedicated to tending to student discipline. The high turnover rate of the assistant principal position created a history threat to the fidelity of implementing meaningful discipline procedures.

Bias. The author of this dissertation worked in the studied school. This created the possibility of bias. In an effort to mitigate bias, the researcher relied primary on data collected from secondary sources. The qualitative data collected came from students no longer attending the school of study. The parents were interviewed after their children graduated from the school of study.

Implementation threat. The fidelity in which the new processes and procedures the principal implemented represented a threat to this study. Teacher resistance to change, inconsistent consequences levied between the principal and assistant principal, and adjusting of new policies during the school year created notable limitations.

Delimitations

The choice of the processes and procedures that the researcher believed needed to change was a delimiting factor. Other delimitations in this study included the

researcher's choice of questions for the survey, focus group, and teacher interviews. Additional delimiting factors included the choice of objectives for this study, the selected methodology and variable in this study set boundaries for what the result could be. The subjectivity of the researcher was a delimiting factor that could have affected this study.

Summary

The culture at MMS needed to change. This study represents the compilation of data to support the need for change, the initiatives undertaken by the building staff to promote change, and the journey throughout the process. The first phase of the changes included revised processes and procedures implemented at the start of the 2009-2010 school year. Subsequent ongoing changes followed when the data collected throughout the year informed the staff of the need for additional change.

Both proactive and reactive changes comprised the new processes and procedures. New procedures specific to hall passing times, lunchroom procedures, hallway activity, discipline referrals, discipline consequences, among others accounted for reactive changes. New student recognition ceremonies, assemblies, lunchroom activities, student ownership in the climate, community involvement, and parent participation in new family events accounted for the proactive changes to promote a positive school culture.

Throughout the journey input from students, teachers, staff, and parents weighed heavily in the decision making process. Input included surveys, open discussions, data driven activities, and simple discussions with all stakeholders.

The following chapter analyzes the findings from the information/data gathered. The information gathered helped inform future decisions ultimately inspiring positive change at MMS.

Chapter Four: Analysis of the Data

The purpose of this study was to determine school improvements in the overall school culture as measured by student behavior, student achievement, and school climate. Chapter 4 begins with a quantitative analysis of the data collected to measure the success of the implementation of new processes and procedures and their respective effect on the overall culture at Midwest Middle School (MMS). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) provided the necessary data related to the MAP academic achievement data (MODESE, 2009). The MMS school district Student Information System (SIS) provided the necessary data related to school discipline. The MSIP Advanced Questionnaire (AQ) survey completed in October of 2008 and published in January of 2009 provided the baseline data for the climate of the building (MODESE, 2009). Qualitative data included anonymous open-ended teacher surveys, student focus groups, as well as parent interviews.

Quantitative Measure of Success of Change on the Culture of MMS

Survey results from a number of different student and staff climate surveys, staff questionnaires, and results from questions asked to a student focus group specific to building climate were triangulated. Differences in academic achievement, student behavior, and overall building climate from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school years served as the focus of the analysis.

Academic Achievement

Analysis of data included a comparison of the percent of MMS students who scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range in communication arts and

mathematics during the 2008-2009 school year to the students who scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range during the 2009-2010 school year. The data analysis provided the necessary information whether to reject the null hypothesis, **"**During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement as measured by the percentage of proficient scores on the MAP test."

Data extracted from MODESE specific to MMS, MAP test scores in communication arts and mathematics was compiled. Data was reported in percentages. A z-Test for difference in proportions was applied to data in both communication arts and mathematics. In addition, a z-Test for difference in proportions was applied to subgroups including Black, Hispanic, Individual Education Plan (IEP), and Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) populations.

Communication Arts.

Null hypothesis #1c: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the total population as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Communication Arts MAP test.

Communication Arts total population: Comparison of the z-test value of 0.34 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student communication arts academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1ca: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the Black subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Communication Arts MAP test.

Communication Arts Black population: Comparison of the z-test value of 1.54 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student communication arts academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1cb: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the Hispanic subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Communication Arts MAP test.

Communication Arts Hispanic population: Comparison of the z-test value of –0.90 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student communication arts academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1cc: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the IEP subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Communication Arts MAP test.

Communication Arts IEP population: Comparison of the z-test value of -0.37 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a

significant difference in student communication arts academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1cd: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the Free and Reduced Lunch subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Communication Arts MAP test.

Communication Arts Free and Reduced Lunch population: Comparison of the z-test value of -1.39 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student communication arts academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

A compilation of the MMS communication arts MAP results comparing the 2009 students who scored proficient or advanced to the students who scored proficient or advanced in 2010 is depicted in Table 11. None of the analyses indicated a significant difference in communication arts scores for the overall population or any of the subgroups from 2009 to 2010.

Table 11

Midwest Middle School Communication Arts MAP Results

Change +/- in Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced

MMS Seventh and Eighth Grade Students

2009 (n=718) 2010 (n=683)

	2009	2010
Total population	53.6%	52.70%
Black	38.5%	28%
Hispanic	22.9%	32%
IEP	37%	39.5%
FRL	11.5%	15.8%

Note: From MODESE, 2010.

The *z*-test results to determine the improvement of the total population as well as the subgroup populations is displayed in Table 12.

Table 12

Midwest Middle School Communication Arts MAP z-Test results

z test values MMS Seventh and Eighth Grade Students 2009 (n=718) 2010 (n=683)	
	Test Values
Total population	0.34
Black	1.54
Hispanic	-0.90
IEP	-0.37
FRL	-1.39

Note: critical value ± 1.96

Mathematics.

Null hypothesis #1m: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the total population as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Mathematics MAP test.

Mathematics total population: Comparison of the *z*-test value of 0.34 to the *z*-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student mathematics academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1ma: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the Black subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Mathematics MAP test.

Mathematics Black population: Comparison of the z-test value of -0.44 to the *z*-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student mathematics academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1mb: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the IEP subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Mathematics MAP test.

Mathematics IEP population: Comparison of the *z*-test value of -0.15 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student mathematics academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1mc: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the Free and Reduced Lunch subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Mathematics MAP test.

Mathematics Free and Reduced Lunch population: Comparison of the *z*-test value of -1.89 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis.

There is not a significant difference in student mathematics academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Null hypothesis #1md: During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in student academic achievement for the Hispanic subgroup as measured by the percentage of proficient and advanced proficient scores on the Mathematics MAP test.

Mathematics Hispanic population: Comparison of the *z*-test value of -0.48 to the z-critical value of 1.96 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in student mathematics academic improvement from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

A compilation of the MMS mathematics MAP results comparing the 2009 students scoring proficient or advanced to the students scoring proficient or advanced in 2010 is depicted in Table 13.

Table 13

Midwest Middle School Mathematics MAP Results

Change +/- in Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced

MMS Seventh and Eighth Grade Students

2009 (n=718) 2010 (n=683)

	2009	2010
Total population	46.1%	51.0%
Black	21%	23.7%
Hispanic	27%	32%
IEP	12.5%	13.2%
FRL	31%	39.1%

Note: From MODESE, 2010.

The z-test results to determine the improvement of the total population as well as the subgroup populations is displayed in table 14.

Table 14

Midwest Middle School Mathematics MAP z-Test results

z-Test values MMS Seventh and Eighth Grade Students 2009 (n=718) 2010 (n=683)	
	Test Values
Total population	0.34
Black	-0.44
Hispanic	-0.48
IEP	-0.15
FRL	-1.89

Note: critical value ± 1.96

Behavior

Analysis of data included a comparison of the total number of MMS discipline referrals levied during the 2008-2009 school year and the 2009-2010 school year. The data analysis provided the necessary information whether to reject the null hypothesis, **"**During implementation of new processes and procedures to improve school culture there will be no difference in behavior as measured by percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS."

A single factor ANOVA was applied to data.

Table 15

Midwest Middle School Single Factor ANOVA Summary

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variances
Quarter 1	3	0.568	0.189	0.200
Quarter 2	3	0.299	0.099	0.301
Semester 1	3	0.426	0.142	0.249
Quarter 3	3	-1.012	-0.337	0.080
Quarter 4	3	-0.802	-0.267	0.022
Semester 2	3	-0.867	-0.289	0.037

Comparison of the *F*-test value of 1.21 to the *F*-critical value of 3.10 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in total percentage of discipline referrals from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. In laymen's terms this test confirms the difference in quarterly and semester discipline referrals from the 2008-2009 base year of study to the 2009-2010 school year was not significantly different.

Table 16

MMS ANOVA Comparison of the F-*test value to the* F-*critical value*

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	0.898	5	0.179	1.208	0.362	3.105
Within Groups	1.783	12	0.148			
Total	2.682	17				

Climate

The data analysis provided the necessary information whether to reject the null hypothesis #3, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by positive perception in comparing responses to a likert scale perception survey by students in multiple timeframes".

Data from the Likert-scale survey was compiled into the number of responses to Agree and Strongly Agree to statements concerning climate. Frequencies were converted into percentages.

A single factor ANOVA was applied to data.

Table 17

Midwest Middle School Single Factor ANOVA Summary

Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*
0.29	9	3.91	0.434	0.037
0.59	9	5.49	0.61	0.011
0.54	9	5.04	0.56	0.015
0.63	9	5.13	0.57	0.013

Comparison of the *F*-test value of 2.65 to the *F*-critical value of 2.90 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in positive perception as the timeline progressed.

Table 18

MMS ANOVA Comparison of the F-test value to the F-critical value

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	0.155	3	0.051	2.647	0.065	2.901
Within Groups	0.626	32	0.019			
Total	0.782	35				

The data analysis also provided the necessary information whether to reject the null hypothesis #4, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by negative perception in comparing responses to a Likert-scale perception survey by students in multiple timeframes."

Data from the Likert-scale survey was compiled into the number of responses to Disagree and Strongly Disagree to statements concerning climate. Frequencies were converted into percentages. A single factor ANOVA was applied to data.

Table 19

Midwest Middle School Single Factor ANOVA Summary

Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*
0.30	9	2.09	0.232	0.006
0.12	9	1.17	0.13	0.002
0.13	9	1.35	0.15	0.003
0.12	9	1.29	0.143	0.002

Comparison of the *F*-test value of 5.27 to the *F*-critical value of 2.90 resulted in rejection of the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference in negative perception as the timeline progressed. The alternate hypothesis is supported, and since the

percentages decreased as the timeline progressed, negative response decreased significantly.

Table 20

MMS ANOVA Comparison of the F-test value to the F-critical value

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	0.057	3	0.019	5.271	0.004	2.901
Within Groups	0.117	32	0.003			
Total	0.175	35				

The analysis of the negative perception was important due to the large proportion of neutral responses to the survey. Students who felt strongly one way or another responded accordingly.

Qualitative Measure of Success of the Change in Culture at MMS

This qualitative analysis includes responses to open-ended surveys distributed to both teachers and parents for the purpose of gathering information specific to teacher and parent perceptions of the culture at MMS. Also included in this analysis is the response from a verbal discussion provided during a student focus group activity.

Teacher Survey

The principal conducted a qualitative analysis on open-ended responses provided in the teacher survey distributed to all MMS teachers. The anonymous, voluntary survey contained eight questions. Of the 54 staff members, 11 responded. Summaries of the responses to each question follow.

#1. As an employee of the school district, please describe your overall experience with MMS during the 2008-2009 school year.

The recurring theme throughout the answers to question #1 was a sense of dissatisfaction with the behavior of the students. Ten of the 11 responses cited issues with student respect. The majority of the responses included dissatisfaction with the administrative response to poor behavior. Teachers in this survey clearly felt little support from administration. One teacher responded, "Poorly behaved kids seemed to run the school and the good kids were afraid." Another teacher added, "Teachers stopped reporting misbehaviors because they weren't being dealt with strongly enough." The stress levels were elevated. Another teacher responded, "I remember seeing teachers crying in the hallways because students they sent for discipline were returned to their classes with no consequence." The school had a reputation; "It was a scary place for both students and staff. The nickname given years ago 'Hell on the Hill' was lived up to!"

#2. During the Fall (November, 2008) of the 2008-2009 school year, MMS students participated in taking a survey mandated by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that survey 37.2% of MMS students agreed with the question, "Teachers in my school really care about me." Please give me your thoughts on that answer.

The teacher responses to this question split. Half the respondents took a negative, defensive approach blaming the negative environment on poor student behavior thus causing the teachers to react in a manner students deemed uncaring. Comments including but not limited to "inmates were running the asylum," "teachers were just trying to

survive," "teachers had to put so much energy into controlling our classrooms that we couldn't focus on building relationships" stood out.

The other half did not make excuses but confirmed an understanding of why the students might feel teachers did not care. Several expressed sadness, "That really broke my heart," "this is very sad," "I wanted to know why they answered that and what we could do to change it." The principal noted the observable differences in teacher opinions.

#3. In that same survey, 52% of MMS students agreed with the question "I feel safe at school." Please give me your thoughts on why MMS students responded that way.

The principal noted several references to student fights in the teacher response to this question. Tied to the same references was discontent regarding the lack of consequences for the behaviors thus creating an unsafe environment. One teacher stated,

> Students responded that way because of the number of fights that we would have in the school and as a result of a fight, a student would be suspended for a few days then be right back in the mix as if nothing ever happened and would continue previous aggression and bullying.

The resounding theme centered on the misbehavior of the students. It was interesting to note that the focus was on the student and administrator behavior. Rarely did teachers cite or take ownership in teacher behavior to this point in the survey.

#4. In the spring of 2009 employees were given a survey in which 10 key questions were taken from the MODESE survey above. Results from that survey are attached (see Table 9). Please review the results and give feedback regarding the

differences in how the staff believed the students would answer and how the students actually answered.

The theme for this question again focused on student behavior. One teacher quote summed up the majority of the responses,

> I believe actions speak louder than words. When we tell the students that we care about their academic performance and then allow bullies and class clowns to monopolize their class time, the kids see our inaction as nonchalance. When we tell the students that we want them to feel safe, but we do not hold all kids up to the same high behavioral standards, the kids see us as aiding the aggressors.

A few of the responses included a genuine desire to reflect on the differences in the teacher verses student perceptions. One teacher responded, "It was a definite eye opener. What happened here? Why was there a disconnect? We've got to start talking with these kids and find out what's going on."

#5. This past year MMS made many changes. From the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year to the end of that year, please describe some of the changes you observed. How would you describe your overall experience with MMS last year? Please elaborate.

The changes that the teachers most noted included behavior of the students and the teachers as well as increase administrator support. Several respondents cited increased teacher support for discipline, "Teacher discipline was taken seriously and students were finally held accountable for their actions." Several teachers cited additional stress due to "a whirlwind of change." A couple of respondents spoke to the

change creating "issues between teachers" and due to teacher cliques, "there seemed to be less of a family feel."

While the majority of respondents cited student accountability, slightly less than half addressed the elevated stress due to increased teacher accountability. One teacher stated, "I think all of the teachers felt like their opinion counted – not just the opinion of those that complained the most. It did not seem as tense. I think more of the teachers were held accountable for their actions (or lack of actions)".

The principal noted the respondents focused on the behavioral changes verses the academic change initiatives. With the exception of respondent number four, the responses focused on the positive changes overall. There was some consistency regarding the elevated stress levels of the faculty due to the number of changes in a short period of time. Several teachers responded the staff seemed "overwhelmed."

#6. Attached to the email is a copy of the 10 questions (Table 15) and answers given by MMS students in both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. After reviewing the differences between the answers what are your thoughts?

The theme of the teacher's responses to the comparisons listed in the table centered on students and teachers feeling more comfortable with the environment thus feeling more successful. The teacher analysis of the data indicated a positive change in the student opinions over the course of the 2009-2010 school year. One teacher quoted,

> When we set and adhere to academic and behavioral boundaries and allow the students the freedom to explore within them, students feel safe: they can grow academically because there's no nonsense in the classroom, and they can grow

socially because of a diminished fear of teacher and administrator apathy about poorly managed student behavior.

The majority of the teacher responses focused on the positive results/direction of the student surveys. Descriptive words and phrases included "student ownership," "with happier teachers, we have happy and motivated students," "more responsibility," "students feel valued," and "students feel more connected to school and not as fearful of the bully's [*sic*]."

Not all responses were positive. Respondent number four continued to provide an opposing viewpoint. The dissenting teacher stated, "Teachers prepped the students for the survey this year. These kids are also good at stating what they think someone else wants to hear."

The entire survey is included in Table 21.

Table 21

MMS Student Survey administered in Fall of 2008, Fall of 2009, Spring 2010

#	Student Survey Question	Dec-08	Dec-09	Apr-10
1	My opinion is valued by teachers and administrators	0.29	0.59	0.54
2	During our classes we stay focused on learning and don't waste time	0.25	0.47	0.43
3	Differences among students and their families are respected in this school	0.46	0.60	0.53
4	Teachers in this school really care about me	0.37	0.62	0.61
5	There is good communication between teachers and students	0.34	0.52	0.49
6	I feel safe at school	0.52	0.67	0.65
7	I like going to this school	0.45	0.61	0.49
8	Discipline is handled fairly in my school	0.41	0.56	0.48
9	Most of my teachers respond to disruptive students quickly and effectively	0.51	0.59	0.52
10	I can do well in school	0.83	0.85	0.84

Note: Students responding positively i.e. agree or strongly agree

#7. From an employee's perspective what, if any, processes and/or procedures were most/least effective during your experience at MMS over the past two years? Please explain your answer.

Responses to this question varied widely. The only agreement between two respondents was the refocus procedure not working effectively. Ironically, four respondents referencing most effective procedures, cited the refocus procedure. The employees listed academic detentions given to students who failed to turn in work, lunch detentions given to students who could not secure transportation for after-school detention, and inequitable plan time for core verses encore teachers and giving common

assessments on teacher half days as effective changes in the processes and procedures at MMS.

Behavior management dominated the responses for the most effective new process. Teachers clearly welcomed consistent, consequence-driven discipline, "The most effective changes have come in student discipline." Rewarding students for practicing good behavior through the student good standing program also received positive feedback. Responses included, "Students working their way back in good standing seems to be effective." Another teacher added, "One of the best incentives is staying in good standing. The students work hard to get back in good standing so they can enjoy the 'fun stuff."

#8. What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving MMS Middle School?

The majority of the respondents cited continuing to work on consistent discipline procedures. Several suggested limiting change.

Student Focus Group

The principal analyzed responses from the verbal discussion during the focus group activity. The principal/researcher asked a series of eight questions to a group of 16 students. The student group included a random sample of students who attended MMS during their seventh and eighth grade and, at the time of the interview, attended the local high school.

#1. Please think back on when you made the transition from where you attended sixth grade to MMS (MMS is a seventh and eighth grade middle school). From the beginning of that seventh grade year to the end, describe your overall experience with MMS (2008-2009).

Students agreed that the new freedom in the halls and at lunch differed from their previous experience. The consensus was that the principal was "really nice" and "cool." The students mentioned the teachers that they liked and teachers they did not. The difference in opinions usually centered around classroom management, class rules, and overall relationships. Students did mention the number of kids who liked to fight. It was common knowledge among the group that students arranged fights, complete with locations and times for those who wanted to watch. The locations included restrooms, lunchroom, and "the fight hallway." The students all knew the hallway on the third floor landing above the gym was the prime location for arranged fights.

There was disagreement regarding the feeling of safety. Some students stated, "as long as you didn't bother anyone, no one would bother you". A couple of female students disputed that claim stating, "that is not true, if a boy liked you (girl) and other girls didn't want him to like you, those girls would cause trouble and even want to fight". Regardless of the disagreements, the theme consistently reinforced previous teacher contentions that students had a great deal of freedom to do as they wished.

#2. During the Fall (November) of your seventh grade year, MMS students participated in taking a survey given by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that survey 37.2% of MMS students agreed with the question "Teachers in my school really care about me". Please give me your thoughts on that answer.

The overwhelming majority of the students responded that they believed this was not an accurate assessment of how the students felt about the MMS staff as a whole. The

students cited examples of bad experiences with specific teachers that they believe could have influenced the data.

> If you have a really bad teacher or two who really makes you mad you are not going to give a good answer to that question, even though you might like the rest of your teachers. The bad teacher sticks in your mind.

The general discussion seemed to support the idea that the data was inaccurate about the majority of the teachers at MMS. The students were quick to point out bad experiences with specific teachers. They were even more enthusiastic to share their thoughts about their favorite teachers and supporting stories as to why they loved those teachers.

#3. In that same survey 52.2% of MMS students agreed with the question, "I feel safe at school." Please give me your thoughts on why students responded that way.

The students shared that they were not at all surprised by this statistic. They shared that MMS was not safe during the 2008-2009 school year. When the principal probed for reasons, one student responded,

> There was a fight almost every day. We had a place called the fight hallway where kids would plan to meet at a certain time and kids would all show up. We would close the hall doors so teachers would not see us and kids would fight.

The students referred to the tough kids ruling the school. Some spoke of just staying away from certain students and others spoke of "making friends with the tough kids so you wouldn't get beat up." When asked if the kids that fought received discipline the students responded that most of the time the kids "never got caught." The students stated that fighting was the only thing that made kids not feel safe. One student stated, "I just

stayed away from the mean kids and they didn't bother me. Everyone knew who the troublemakers were. They actually were some of the most popular kids."

Overall, the consensus of the group was that if fighting and bullying were not an issue, the school would be completely safe.

#4 This past year MMS made many changes. From the beginning to the end of your eighth grade year, please describe some of the changes you observed. How would you describe your overall experience with MMS your eighth grade year (2009-2010)?

The students agreed that their overall experience was good. The things that stood out were the student activities. The favorite activity was the Olympic Team competitions. The group also stated the students enjoyed the spirit weeks, dances, hallway-decorating contests, and the home boys and girls basketball games against a rival middle school. One student stated that she loved her eighth grade year because it was "fun and full of things to do." Several students also mentioned the new food in the cafeteria made their last year a good one.

From the discipline standpoint, students cited the number of arrests for fighting. One student commented, "Kids that wanted to fight knew they would go to jail so most kids either didn't fight or fought at the park." While some students did not agree with the harsh consequence for fighting, the majority of those interviewed liked the new policy because they stated it made them feel safe.

The primary theme that emerged from the discussion was that MMS was much "stricter" during the 2009-2010 school year. Students mentioned the increase in rules specific to the requirement for hallway passes, the crackdown on student tardies, and the assignment of tables during lunch. When one student mentioned, "Sometimes it felt like

we were in a prison with all the rules," another student countered, "yes but we also had a lot more fun activities like the Olympics." Several students joined in the discussion defending the rules and stating that the school was much safer; "I liked the rules because the bad kids didn't rule the school anymore."

The majority of the students did not like having assigned tables during lunch. The students voiced that lunch should be free time to do whatever they wanted. Equally unpopular was the ban on using cell phones during the school day. One student reasoned, "If you want to cut down on discipline just let us use our phones, that will make kids happy and when they are happy they are more likely to follow the rest of the rules."

#5. During your eighth grade year at MMS 10 of the same questions given in the seventh grade survey mentioned earlier were again asked in December this past year. Do you believe the answers to these same questions were similar or different in the eighth grade survey versus the seventh grade survey? Why or why not?

The students did not believe there would be much of a difference in the question, "My teachers really care about me" but did believe students would have answered the "I feel safe" question in a much more positive manner.

When asked to elaborate on the teacher caring question, the students spoke of the different team makeups, specifically addressing certain teachers. They stated that it only takes one disliked teacher for the students to answer the question in a negative manner. The students mentioned the fact that electives classes only met for a quarter thus students did not have a chance to get to know teachers and vice versa. They stated almost all students experienced at least one core and/or elective teacher they did not like because the teacher did not like them thus the reasoning for the survey results to that question.

The reason for the student response to second question referencing safety at school was simply the perception of a discipline crackdown specifically addressing fighting and bullying in the school.

#6. Here is a copy of the 10 questions and answers given by MMS students in both your seventh and eighth grade years. After reviewing the differences between the answers, what do you think?

The students did not have an explanation for the increases in the positive responses from the 2008-2009 school year to the December survey in the 2009-2010 school year. The remaining eight questions all realized increases in positive responses. The greatest increase came in the question, "My opinion is valued by teachers and administrators" with a 30 point gain. Students stated that this could have been the result of more communication from the teachers and administrators in the form of talking during Tiger Connection. One student commented, "It seems like teachers and administrators were asking for our opinion more." Even though the survey did not show a statistically significant increase in positive responses, the increases across the board were cause for celebration.

#7. What, if any, processes and/or procedures were most/least effective in your experience at MMS?

The students cited the most effective changes in the processes and procedures was arresting kids for fighting and instituting a hall pass procedure.

The least effective changes in the processes and procedures according to students was the refocus procedure and lunch table assignments.

#8. What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving Midwest Middle School?

The students listed the following suggestions:

Have more dances and assemblies.

Have an Olympics once a month.

Let students sit wherever they want during lunch every day.

Let students use their phones and iPods during lunch and in the halls during passing.

Let students pick whatever team/teachers they want.

Better food in the cafeteria.

Parent Interviews

The principal/researcher randomly selected six parents to participate in this study. The principal/researcher contacted the parents by phone. The parents interviewed were representative of the student population attending Midwest Middle School.

#1. Please think back on when your child made the transition from where they attended sixth grade to Midwest Middle School. From the beginning of their seventh grade year to the end, describe your overall experience with MMS during the 2008-2009 school year.

Parents were extremely consistent in their responses regarding the negative perceptions in the community regarding MMS. The MMS community is relatively small with a rich history. The parents of the vast majority of the students attending MMS grew up in the community, and many attended MMS. Prior to the reorganization of the district

into one seventh and eighth grade center, there were two middle schools in the district. The majority of the students who had trouble in school and/or got into trouble in school attended MMS. One parent commented, "I know what goes on at MMS, I went here and it was rough." While they acknowledged the challenges in the school, the parents were happy overall with their children's experience and education.

#2. During the Fall (November) of your child's seventh grade year, Midwest students participated in taking a survey given by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that survey 37.2% of Midwest students agreed with the question, "Teachers in my school really care about me." Please give me your thoughts on that answer.

The parents responded that they were somewhat surprised by the student's answer to this question. They expressed that their children were happy with their team/teachers. Several did acknowledge they could understand how some would answer the question in this manner based on some stories their children brought home regarding the behavior some teachers. One parent commented, "You have to understand 13 year olds, they make decisions based on what happened ten minutes ago. Perhaps something happened that day that upset one or more students and that word spread quickly." Another parent added, "I know there are always a group of teachers that really care. I believe that perhaps some teachers were lacking high expectations for themselves and students picked up on that." The impression the principal/researcher gleaned from the parent responses was that they did not believe the number was representative of how their child felt.

#3. In that same survey, 52.2% of MMS students agreed with the question, "I feel safe at school." Please give me your thoughts on why students responded that way.

Parents felt the low percentage of students reporting they felt safe was the result of the school's reputation. The parents did not express concern for their children's safety respective to attending MMS. One parent stated, "When my daughter comes home from school she does not mention fear or lack of safety. She does talk about the drama that goes on with friends that usually involves issues with boys." Another parent added, "Perhaps a reason could be that some students reported incidents to the teachers or principals and they felt nothing was done about it." Data from the MSIP questionnaire supports the parent's position that they do not see safety as a major problem at MMS.

#4. This past year MMS made many changes. From the beginning to the end of your child's eighth grade year, please describe some of the changes you observed. How would you describe your overall experience with MMS during your child's eighth grade year (2009-2010)?

Parents expressed that they were pleased with the 2009-2010 school year. Several mentioned that their children enjoyed the new activities added during the year. One parent made the statement, "I was set to pull my son out and put him in private school. He begged me to let him stay with his friends and I am glad I did. This has been a great year." The majority of the comments referred to the change in the discipline expectations from the previous year. One parent stated, "Kids took more ownership in school, they felt comfortable sharing their opinions and they knew if they reported bad things something would be done about it". The parents consistently shared that their children returned from school excited and happy.

#5. Here is a copy of the 10 questions and answers given by MMS students in both your child's seventh and eighth grade years (provide each participant a copy of the survey results). After reviewing the differences between the answers what do you think?

Parents found the results of a few questions interesting. All the questions dealing with building relationships showed notable increases. The parents expressed surprise by the answers from the 2008 survey. An example cited was the question, "My teachers care about me" with only a 37% positive response. The 2009 survey recorded a 25 point gain to 62% positive responses to the same question. One parent commented that it seemed there was a big problem with student's perception of teachers in 2008.

#6. From a parent's perspective what, if any, processes and/or procedures were most/least effective during your child's experience at MMS over the past two years? Please explain your answer.

Once again, all the parents mentioned the improved discipline procedures. One parent commented, "The biggest change was teaching kids expectations. The kids were actually taught how they were expected to act." A couple liked the new activities specifically mentioning the Olympic competitions and the basketball challenge when MMS played against a school from a neighboring district.

#7. What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving MMS?

Parents expressed overall satisfaction with MMS. They consistently commented on continuing the firm discipline policies put in place. A specific phrase one parent used was, "Stay the course." A couple of parents mentioned the idea of reaching out and asking parents to help the school. They offered their assistance with the evening activities.

The only concern one parent mentioned was the communication home. They stated that their child "Never brings anything home." They suggesting using the school website to post all things sent home with students. They also suggested forcing teachers to keep a website with all assignments. They expressed appreciation for the teachers who currently keep an up-to-date website.

Summary

The data in Chapter 4 provided no evidence to suggest that there was a statistically significant change in student academic achievement and/or behavior at MMS from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. The climate data provided mixed results. While the climate data provided no evidence to suggest a statistically significant change in positive perception of the building climate at MMS, the data did provide evidence of a significant change in a reduced negative perception of the building climate from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year.

The achievement data provided no evidence to support the alternative hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no improvement in the total population in student communication arts academic achievement as measured by the percentage of proficient scores on the MAP test." The discipline data provided no evidence to support the alternative hypothesis, **"**During implementation of new processes and procedures to improve school culture there will be no difference in behavior as measured by percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter to quarter and semester to semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS." However, based on personal observation and

qualitative feedback the principal/researcher noted observable differences in student behavior.

The climate data provided no evidence to support the alternative hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by positive perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes." Based on personal observation and qualitative feedback, the principal/researcher noted observable differences in positive perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes.

The climate data provided evidence to support the alternative hypothesis, "During implementation of strategies to improve school culture there will be no difference in climate as measured by negative perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes."

Further discussion and recommendations regarding the above findings is found in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five: Discussions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine improvements in the overall school culture at MMS as measured by student behavior, student achievement, and school climate. Changes were made in the overall structure at MMS regarding how the school was managed from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year.

The research question that guided this study was, "What, if any, relationship was there between the change in the school culture at Midwest Middle School from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year and the changes in the overall structure of how the school was managed?" Three sub questions accompanied the research question:

Sub question 1. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year affect student academic achievement?

Sub question 2. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures throughout the 2009-2010 school year affect student behavior?

Sub question 3. Will the changes implemented in processes and procedures during the 2009-2010 school year affect school climate?

The MMS staff had endured a major reorganization and restructuring during the 2007-2008 school year. Many teachers were involuntarily transferred to MMS when the district made a change to a fifth and sixth grade intermediate school and a seventh and eighth grade middle school. Two changes in the assistant principal, three changes in the school schedule, and the most recent addition of a new head principal tested the resilience of the staff. Understanding the difficulties associated with change, the principal/researcher aspired to move decisively without moving too quickly as to cause additional stress to an already stressed staff.

Review of Methodology

The changes in processes and procedures included procedural changes in the way information was gathered and ultimately utilized by the school staff. The focus of this study included the effects of said changes on academic achievement, behavior, and climate. Examples of procedural changes included revisions to hall and cafeteria movement patterns, clear and consistent discipline expectations/consequences, relationship building strategies, positive behavior support plans, and structured supervision before, during, and after school.

An effort to improve academic achievement prompted changes in the way data was gathered and analyzed, and the resulting information utilized. Teachers not only studied student results, but also studied how well they compared to their colleagues teaching the same subject matter.

The principal noted an abundance of plan time in every teacher's schedule. When the district implemented an eight-block schedule for Grades 7 through 12, teachers received 88 minutes of plan time every day. The leadership designed the schedule so departments had common plan on one day, and teams had common plan on the second. The board policy dictated that each teacher receive 50 minute of plan per day or 250 per week. The principal scheduled teachers to meet with their respective teams or departments for the remaining 38 minutes each day for collaboration.

The expectation for team collaboration time included discussions around specific needs of specific students on their respective teams. This was the time to discuss academic achievement data and discipline issues. The expectation for department

collaboration time was writing common assessments that aligned to the district and state curriculum.

School Academic Achievement Data Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of data included a comparison of the percent of MMS students who scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range in Communication Arts and Mathematics MAP tests during the 2008-2009 school year to the students who scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range during the 2009-2010 school year. The principal/researcher applied a *z*-test for difference in proportions to data in both communication arts and mathematics. In addition, the principal/researcher applied a *z*-test for difference in proportions to subgroups including Black, Hispanic, Individual Education Plan (IEP), and Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) populations.

All tests regarding academic achievement resulted in a non-rejection of the null hypothesis. This result translated meant there was not a significant difference in student communication arts and/or mathematics academic improvement overall or in any subgroup analyzed from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year.

Possible reasons for the insignificant academic improvement could have pointed to inconsistent alignment of the teacher developed common assessments to the MAP test. The teachers' common assessments may have covered the essential material however the common language and/or question design may have failed to mirror the actual test questions on the MAP test.

Implications Regarding Non-significant Academic Achievement Improvement

The changes in the processes and procedures specific to academic achievement included the analysis of academic data broken down into specific categories with the intention of isolating areas of strength and weakness. For example, MMS students struggled in the area of number orders and operations for mathematics. After the principal shared the findings, the teachers then worked together during common department plan time to develop teaching strategies to address this area of deficiency.

The principal/researcher identified teacher and student patterns of success and/or failure of specific standards using the Item Benchmark Data (IBD) published for district use on the MODESE (2010) website. The principal shared this information with each relevant department for discussion. Working together, the teachers researched best practices, gathered, and shared strategies to improve. This also shed light on which teachers were doing a good job teaching a specific concept. The researcher, along with the teachers, found that in some cases data did not support some previous assumptions about teacher's effectiveness.

The researcher believes this data can be a powerful tool however cautions the delivery of the data to the teachers. In order for teachers to be receptive to such information, they must trust that motivation on the part of leadership is to help them improve. The implications of this study for the principal/researcher of no significant improvement suggests that the practices specific to academic achievement at MMS need further examination.

School Behavior Data Analysis and Discussion

Analysis of data included a comparison of the total number of MMS discipline referrals levied during the 2008-2009 school year compared to the 2009-2010 school year. The data analysis focused on the percent of change in discipline referrals comparing quarter-to-quarter and semester-to-semester results for the categories of discipline referrals, ISS, and OSS.

A single factor ANOVA was applied to data. Comparison of the *F*-test value of 1.21 to the *F*-critical value of 3.10 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in percent of discipline referrals from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. The researcher believes the changes in the 2009-2010 discipline procedures throughout the year set a firm foundation for the years to follow. While no significant differences in the number of discipline referrals emerged, the researcher notes changes throughout the year that caused increased numbers of written referrals.

An example of a change that caused increased referrals included the new procedure to issue a consequence for chronic referrals. The process for a student reporting to class late followed a process including a warning for the first offense, a call home for the second, and a call home with a referral to the principal on the third and each subsequent tardy. This process was followed in eight different classes meaning a student could reach eight tardies (one per class) and never receive a consequence. The principal implemented a system that tracked all cumulative tardies thus allowing a consequence for an accumulation of minor infractions. This new procedure increased overall referrals thus rendering data somewhat unreliable.

Implications Regarding Non-significant Behavior Improvement

The implications of no significant decrease in overall discipline referrals suggest the need to continue to examine and ultimately revise the discipline practices at MMS. However, the principal/researcher reported observable differences in hallway and cafeteria behavior. An overall first semester decrease of 424 discipline referrals combined with a second semester decrease from 1919 to 950 total referrals was noteworthy.

It is difficult to make assumptions on building behavior in reference to discipline referrals due to the subjective nature of those responsible for writing discipline referrals. In an effort to create a more consistent procedure, the principal implemented a new process. The administrator took responsibility for writing all referrals. Teachers simply referred discipline to the office and the administrator levied the appropriate consequence. Since the 2009-2010 year of study, the discipline/behavior of the students at MMS has improved remarkably.

Positive School Climate Data Analysis and Discussion

Data from the Likert-scale survey was compiled into the number of responses to Agree and Strongly Agree to statements concerning climate. Frequencies were converted into percentages. A single factor ANOVA was applied to data. Comparison of the *F*-test value of 2.65 to the *F*-critical value of 2.90 resulted in non-rejection of the null hypothesis. There is not a significant difference in positive perception as the timeline progressed.

The principal/researcher believes the timing of the survey could have impacted the student responses. The baseline survey administered by MOSESE in the Fall of 2008 yielded alarmingly negative results. The subsequent survey in December of 2009 showed remarkable improvement. Students again completed the same survey in May of 2010 during that same school year. The May survey followed a period of intense work preparing for the MAP test. The timing may have affected the students' responses.

Implications Regarding Non-significant Positive School Climate Improvement

The implications of no significant difference in positive perception of the building climate suggest the need to continue to examine the current practices designed to improve the climate at MMS. While building leadership introduced many new practices that specifically targeted improving building climate, the leadership at MMS understood the importance of finding new and innovative solutions to better promote a positive school climate.

Negative School Climate Data Analysis and Discussion

Data from the Likert-scale survey was compiled into the number of responses to Disagree and Strongly Disagree to statements concerning climate. Frequencies were converted into percentages. A single factor ANOVA was applied to data. Comparison of the *F*-test value of 5.27 to the *F*-critical value of 2.90 resulted in rejection of the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference in diminishing negative perception as the timeline progressed. Negative responses decreased.

The principal/researcher believes students did not want to commit to "thinking positive"; however, they were not prepared to committing to negative answers as well.

This movement reinforced the researcher's belief that MMS was making progress in the area of building climate.

Implications Regarding Significant Reduction in Negative School Climate

The implication of a significant difference in the diminishing negative perception of the building climate at MMS suggests that some of the effort and practices to improve the positive climate made an impact. While the eventual hope is to increase the positive climate in the building, decreasing the negative perceptions is a step in the right direction. Building leadership must continue to work on new and innovative ways to improve building climate at MMS.

Recommendations for Further Study

The principal/researcher targeted a limited timeframe of one school year to study. A new principal in a new building in a new district alone posed a daunting challenge. Based on the observable differences in behavior and climate in the first year the principal/researcher recommends further study in both areas.

The state of Missouri administers the advanced questionnaire as part of the MSIP review. The five-year cycle for Missouri MSIP for the Midwest district will be the 2013-2014 school year. Should the current leadership remain in place until then, a five-year comparison may yield results that are more comprehensive. The principal/researcher recommends the continued development of strategies to affect school culture culminating with a comparative analysis of the 2008 MSIP AQ survey to the 2013 MSIP AQ survey.

The principal/researcher recommends expanding on the processes and procedures put into place by adding positive behavior support programs. The majority of the rules

put into place during the 2009-2010 school year were reactions to data gathered specifically targeting negative behavior. The development of system to recognize and reward students for good behavior is worthy of future study.

Discussion

MMS's improvements in the areas of discipline and climate were not statistically significant; however, the school made observable progress during the 2009-2010 school year. Academic achievement realized little to no progress and, in some grades/subject areas, declined.

When disaggregating the academic achievement data, the principal/researcher found a consistent achievement pattern of the students of specific teachers and/or grade levels. The isolation of problem areas did not necessarily translate into improved teaching strategies to move the struggling students to greater levels of learning. This finding supported the need for continued professional development of teachers at all stages of their careers. While the information was somewhat discouraging, the result forced all stakeholders to reflect on current practices. Teachers discovered areas of concern they never realized existed.

One teacher shared that her students performed poorly on one of her favorite topics to teach. She shared that after speaking with the students and reviewing the data, she believed she was over-teaching the concept thus the students were overthinking the questions. The discussion resulted in a colleague whose students scored better in that particular area shared her lessons and teaching strategies. The concept of learning from

one another through meaningful collaboration became paramount to teachers who once resisted the idea.

The principal/researcher noted the pattern of the cohort groups of students moving through grade levels. The current system of academic tracking implemented by the state of Missouri measures the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of schools based on grade level tracking. The result is comparing different groups of students thus posing a threat to the reliability of the data gathered. The cohort group could show considerable growth or decline but that growth or decline goes unrecognized due to the monitoring system in place specific to AYP.

The safety concern from the 2008-2009 school year could not be ignored. The "I feel safe at School" question from the student AQ survey administered in 2008 consisted of one question that measured the degree to which students believed they were safe while at school (MODESE, 2009). The 615 students responding from MMS reported a mean score of 3.44, which placed it at the eighth percentile, scoring lower than 92% of mid-level schools in the state (p. 35). The results of that survey confirmed the student's need to feel safe.

While MMS leadership noted observable differences in discipline referrals, the overall discipline referrals did not show a statistically significant decline. The staff and students at MMS celebrated the nearly 40% reduction in overall discipline referrals from the 2008-2009 to the 2009-2010 school year. The result was positive feedback in the subsequent surveys and interview questions.

The principal/researcher noted the recurring themes to discipline specific questions to the qualitative portion of this study. The responses consistently referred to

improved behavior of the students due to clear and consistent consequences for code of conduct violations. While the students expressed dissatisfaction with the increase in school rules, they were very happy with the outcome. The students and staff expressed gratitude for the tremendous reduction in fighting and assaults at MMS. Understanding that the first responsibility of a building leader is to provide a safe and orderly environment for students and staff the principal/researcher considered the response noteworthy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to determine school improvements in the overall school culture as measured by student behavior, student achievement and school climate. Culture represents "deeply rooted traditions, values and beliefs" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3). The culture of a school informs the way things "get done" and more importantly "frames how change efforts are perceived" (Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2009, p. 3). Understanding change is difficult, but necessary to grow, the principal/researcher did not waiver from the overall mission when some initiatives appeared to be unsuccessful.

The "change initiatives" the principal implemented received positive reviews from staff and students. The observable differences in the building were certainly noteworthy. However, the principal/researcher could not discount the data specific to the sub-questions. The changes implemented in processes and procedures during the studied year did not affect student academic achievement.

The practice of disaggregating individual student and teacher data did serve to inform teachers of specific areas of concern and in many situations, prompted self-

reflection that may not have otherwise took place. The principal/researcher believed this practice positively affected teacher-to-teacher collaboration/communication.

The data revealed no significant difference in total number of discipline referrals from the 2008-2009 school year to the 2009-2010 school year. Feeling safe socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically is a fundamental need (Cohen & Geier, 2010). Research shows a direct correlation between feeling safe at school and a healthy student-learning environment (Devine & Cohen, 2007).

A safe environment is absolutely an essential element to an effective school (Lezotte, 1991; Marzanno, 2003a; Canter, 2010). In order to secure a safe environment and just as important, an obvious appearance of a safe environment, schools must work together with staff, students, parents and administration. While the discipline referrals declined, the violent offenses decreased and the observable appearance of a safe environment existed. The principal/researcher suggested the need for continued efforts to reduce discipline referrals and ultimately improve student behavior.

The third sub question addressed the changes implemented in processes and procedures during the 2009-2010 school year and the resulting effect on school climate. The principal/researcher found mixed results when addressing this question. While there was no significant difference in climate as measured by positive perception in comparing responses to the climate survey in multiple timeframes, there was in fact a significant difference in climate as measured by the negative perception in comparing responses in multiple timeframes. The principal/researcher found that student negative perception of MMS significantly declined throughout the 2010 school year.

In education, there is a constant search for the perfect system. Leaders look for the most effective process or procedure, the best practice that maximizes student performance. Educators face challenges that are more complex and more demanding than ever. Changes in the way districts and schools are measured has increased dramatically over the past decade thus the mandate to produce proficient students is non-negotiable.

The pressure to meet predetermined minimum levels of performance for all students, while noble in concept, has created many questions for those charged with this seemingly insurmountable task. One could argue that a side effect of such an expectation has had a negative impact on overall school climate while the opposing view could make the argument that the expectations work citing increased achievement on standardized tests as of result of the new accountability standards.

This journey encompassed many emotions including but certainly not limited to anxiety, stress, pain, disappointment, joy, elation, satisfaction, success, and a sense of pride/accomplishment. While educators will always be on a constant quest to find a better way to ensure learning for all students, the fact is that this will require deep reflection, honesty, hard work, and a willingness to embrace meaningful change. In the case of this small suburban middle school, the results were thought provoking.

Changing the culture of a school is not a one-year project. Implementing new processes and procedures alone will not produce results. Preparing students for the 21st century world before them is a difficult challenge. The combination of a solid foundation of processes and procedures, continuous professional development, and most importantly motivated and inspiring educators will guide MMS into the future. The

principal/researcher suggests further study is needed to determine improvements in the overall school culture at Midwest Middle School.

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Appendix A

Teachers Answers to how they believed students would answer Ten Question Survey with Student's actual answers

		Teacher's Perceptions	Student's Actual Answers
	SA = Srongly Agree A = Agree	SA or A	SA or A
1	My Opinion is valued by teachers and administrators	63%	28.50%
2	During our classes we stay focused on learning and don't waste time	60%	25.20%
3	Differences among students and their families are respected in this school	67%	25.20%
4	Teachers in this school really care about me	82.30%	37.20%
5	There is good communication between teachers and students	67.40%	33.80%
6	I feel safe at school	60.90%	52.20%
7	I like going to this school	70.10%	45.10%
8	Discipline is handled fairly in my school	26.10%	41.30%
9	Most of my teachers respond to disruptive students quickly and effectively	56.50%	50.90%
10	I can do well in school	91.30%	83.40%

Appendix B

Midwest Middle School Teacher's responses to the question what do you think is good about your school, what is bad, and what is ugly? The numbers following the response represent frequency of that particular answer.

Good	Bad (Needs to Improve)	Ugly (Not Working)
Presence of Teachers in the hallways	Refocus (4)	Keys (not enough)
Intramurals	Sustained Silent Reading (3)	Broken equipment PE (2)
Staff Interaction (2)	Hallway chaos	Student disrespect (2)
Technology (4)	Schedule (3)	New teachers orientation
Kids involvement	Consistent discipline	Socialization
Collaboration (6)	APEX (4)	Lunch room
L.A. coordinator	Enrichment Curriculum (2)	Behavior/Trash @ lunch
Team Time (3)	Early Release Day (4)	Consistent policy (4)
Block Schedule (3)	Character Ed results	Time for new procedures
Guidance	Reading Interventions	Grade book (4)
Consistency	Teach To's fading(2)	Alternative School needed
Good Start	SPED Schedule (2)	Problem Students (2)
Uniform Expectations	CWC Classes too large	Student Accountability (2)
Library	More Electives	Scheduling (2)
Support Staff (3)	Not turning in work	Too many PD ½ days
Three Lunches	ISS	SPED students can't do math
Teach Too	Tardies	Reports cards
Character Education		Dress code

Appendix C

Correlates of effective school: the first and second generations

- Safe and Orderly Environment
- Climate of High Expectations for Success
- Instructional Leadership
- Clear and Focused Mission
- Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task
- Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
- Home-School Relations

Note: Lezotte, L. W. (1991). *Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation*.

Appendix D

Characteristics of a PLC

- Shared Mission, Vision, Values and Goals
- A Collaborative Culture with a Focus on Learning
- Collective Inquiry Into Best Practice and Current Reality
- Action Orientation: Learning by Doing
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement
- Results Orientation

Note: DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting Professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools.*

Appendix E

Cycle of Ongoing Learning

- Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning
- Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implementing the strategies and ideas
- Analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

Note: DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting Professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools*

Appendix F

Teacher and parent responses to case study survey regarding school discipline policies

	Teachers	Parents
Schools need good discipline and behavior in order to flourish.	97%	78%
The school's mission needs to include teaching kids to follow rules.	93%	88%
The school experience of most students suffers at the expense of a few chronic offenders.	85%	73%
Teachers believe students pay heavy academic price when schools tolerate bad behavior.	77%	NA
Many parents believe their child would accomplish more if the school did not have discipline problems.	NA	43%
Lack of parental support and ever-present fear of lawsuits are concerns for teachers.	78%	NA
. Teachers and parents support the idea of zero tolerance so students know they will be removed from school for serious behaviors.	93%	89%

Note: accessed at http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/teaching interupted

Appendix G

Teacher and parent responses to case study survey regarding school discipline policies

Attributes of effective teachers regarding classroom management
• A strong teacher voice
• High expectations for student behavior
• An effective classroom discipline plan
• Policies and procedures taught at the beginning of the year
• The ability to motivate all student to quickly follow directions and to get and stay on task
• The ability to build trusting relationships with students
• The ability to gain support from parents and administrators

Note: Canter, L. (2010). Assertive Discipline: Positive behavior management for today's classroom.

Appendix H

Midwest Middle School

Name: _____

Position: _____

About Me: _____

PHOTO

HERE

Please include members of your family and their ages, hobbies, interests, etc. The purpose of this questionnaire is so I can get to know you better. Thank you in advance for your help.

_____

_____

What are you most proud of with respect to your work at MMS?

What do view as the greatest challenges at MMS?

What advice/words of wisdom do you have for the new principal at MMS?

Appendix I

BEHAVIOR SOLUTIONS	Staff Votes
Spend 5 min. to review Teach To's	10
Find a sub for AM duty - Notify group	3
Be present in Hallway	17
New Strategies for problem students	1
3 lunch shifts	2
Rework Tardy policy	7
Have core classes during Early Release Day	6
Making students accountable for actions	5
Consistency between staff regarding expectations/discipline	20
Help students do work during class and turn it in at the end	5
More electives and workable schedule	8
Spend more time rewarding and encouraging students	1
Develop a plan with parents on problem students	2
Students will be refocused if they disrupt classroom	7
Plan team bonuses to celebrate students who do what they should	1
Length regarding shorts and skirts - No sagging	10
Cafeteria needs order during and at dismissal of lunch	2
Will use Character Education concepts in my daily lesson plans	7
Teachers and Students will understand the policies and follow them	1
COMMITMENT	
I will meet more consistently with the teachers on team	12
Use Tech support to continue my knowledge	8
Use outside resources and materials to improve students grades	1
Work with APEX teacher on expectations	3
Make sure resources are available for students & teachers	3
Build a better video library	2
Engage myself with my students in SSR	4
Will help with ideas and organization of alternative school	7
Will insure I give respect to teachers and students	3
Encourage involvement in after school activities	9
Every effort to have schedules and class lists by first day	2
Will help to insure class sizes are kept at a reasonable level	1
Will be more appreciative of Support Staff's work	3
Work on processing a guide for new Sped teachers	2
Try to have more time for student interventions	1
Staff accountability for P.D. days	1
I will continue to help with social events for the staff	3
Willing to work with New Teachers on issues and concerns	5
Meet with 5th & 6th grade teachers on videos they need for GLE's	2
Staff involvement to develop relationship with students	1
I will improve environment to make it a place where students want to be	1
I will send work for ISS	1
Invite Guidance to team meetings to be more informed of students	1
Help students be more of a family unit	1

Appendix J

Midwest Middle School Staff

Collective Commitments

1. **All staff members will collectively commit to adhere to the guidelines and policies of our building 100% of the time.**

2. **This year we will have an environment of respect where relationships are built in and among faculty, staff and students, as measured by the "Climate Survey" results each semester.**

3. **90% of staff will be visible in the hallway before and after school and between classes.**

4. **All students and staff will follow the dress code set by the board policy.**

5. **This year we will have at least one event per quarter that rewards students with good grades and/or no discipline issues.**

Appendix K

Teachers Answers to how they believed students would answer Ten Question Survey with Student's actual answers

	SA = Srongly Agree A = Agree	Teacher's Perceptions SA or A	Student's Actual Answers SA or A
1	My Opinion is valued by teachers and administrators	63%	28.50%
2	During our classes we stay focused on learning and don't waste time	60%	25.20%
3	Differences among students and their families are respected in this school	67%	25.20%
4	Teachers in this school really care about me	82.30%	37.20%
5	There is good communication between teachers and students	67.40%	33.80%
6	I feel safe at school	60.90%	52.20%
7	I like going to this school	70.10%	45.10%
8	Discipline is handled fairly in my school	26.10%	41.30%
9	Most of my teachers respond to disruptive students quickly and effectively	56.50%	50.90%
10	I can do well in school	91.30%	83.40%

Appendix L

Student Interview Questions

1. Please think back on when you made the transition from where you attended sixth grade to Midwest Middle (Midwest is a 7th & 8th grade middle school). From the beginning of that 7th grade year to the end, describe your overall experience with Midwest Middle School (2008-2009).

2. During the fall (November) of your seventh grade year, Midwest students participated in taking a survey given by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that survey 37.2% of Midwest students agreed with the question "Teachers in my school really care about me". Please give me your thoughts on that answer.

3. In that same survey 52.2% of Midwest agreed with the question "I feel safe at school". Please give me your thoughts on why Midwest students responded that way.

4. This past year Midwest made many changes. From the beginning to the end of your 8th grade year, please describe some of the changes you observed. How would you describe your overall experience with Midwest Middle School your eighth grade year (2009-2010)?

5. During your eighth grade year at Midwest ten of the same questions given in the 7th grade survey mentioned earlier were again asked in December this past year. Do you believe the answers to these same questions were similar or different in the 8th grade survey verses the 7th grade survey? Why or why not?

6. Here is a copy of the ten questions and answers given by Midwest students in both your 7th and 8th grade years (provide each participant a copy of the survey results). After reviewing the differences between the answers what do you think?

7. What, if any, processes and/or procedures were most/least effective in your experience at MMS? Please explain your answer.

8. What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving Midwest Middle School?

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Staff Interview Questions

1. As an employee of the Midwest School District please describe your overall experience with MMS Middle School during the 2008-2009 school year.

2. During the fall (November, 2008) of the 2008-2009 school year, Midwest students participated in taking a survey mandated by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that survey 37.2% of Midwest students agreed with the question "Teachers in my school really care about me". Please give me your thoughts on that answer.

3. In that same survey 52.2% of Midwest agreed with the question "I feel safe at school". Please give me your thoughts on why Midwest students responded that way.

4. In the spring of 2009 employees were given a survey in which ten key questions were taken from the DESE survey above. Results from that survey are attached. Please review your results and give feedback.

5. This past year Midwest made many changes. From the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year to the end of that year, please describe some of the changes you observed. How would you describe your overall experience with MIdwest Middle School last year? Please elaborate.

6. Here is a copy of the ten questions and answers given by Midwest students in both the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. After reviewing the differences between the answers what are your thoughts?

7. From an employee's perspective what, if any, processes and/or procedures were most/least effective during your experience at Midwest over the past two years? Please explain your answer.

8. What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving Midwest Middle School?

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Appendix M

Parent Interview Questions

1. Please think back on when your child made the transition from where they attended sixth grade to Midwest Middle. From the beginning of their 7th grade year to the end, describe your overall experience with Midwest Middle School (2008-2009).

2. During the fall (November) of your child's seventh grade year, Midwest students participated in taking a survey given by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In that survey 37.2% of Midwest students agreed with the question "Teachers in my school really care about me". Please give me your thoughts on that answer.

3. In that same survey 52.2% of MMS agreed with the question "I feel safe at school". Please give me your thoughts on why Midwest students responded that way.

4. This past year MMS made many changes. From the beginning to the end of your child's 8th grade year, please describe some of the changes you observed. How would you describe your overall experience with Midwest Middle School during your child's eighth grade year (2009-2010)?

5. Here is a copy of the ten questions and answers given by Midwest students in both your child's 7th and 8th grade years (provide each participant a copy of the survey results). After reviewing the differences between the answers what do you think?

6. From a parent's perspective what, if any, processes and/or procedures were most/least effective during your child's experience at Midwest over the past two years? Please explain your answer.

7. What, if any, suggestions do you have for improving Midwest Middle School?

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Appendix N

MODESE Advanced Questionnaire Survey Categories

Faculty Guaranteed & Viable Curriculum scale

Faculty Data Use scale

Faculty Differentiated Instruction scale

Student Instructional Strategies scale

Faculty Instructional Strategies scale

Faculty Efficacy & Expectations scale

Parent Efficacy & Expectations scale

Student Efficacy & Expectations scale

Faculty School Climate scale

Parent School Climate scale

Student School Climate scale

Faculty Classroom Management scale

Student Classroom Management scale

Faculty Leadership scale

Student Equity scale

Faculty Equity scale

Faculty Safe & Orderly Environment scale

Parent Safe & Orderly Environment scale

Student Feel Safe question

Faculty Collegiality & Professionalism scale

Faculty Professional Development scale

Faculty Library scale

Faculty Career Education scale

Secondary Student Career Education scale

Appendix O

Teacher Efficacy & Expectations

The efficacy and expectations scale from the faculty Advance Questionnaire identified the degree to which teachers believe that they are capable of impacting student achievement. The Faculty scale for Efficacy & Expectations consists of seven questions. The original questions and a summary of district combined with the specific school summary responses follow:

Faculty	percentile	mean	std_dev	n
There are avenues for recognizing and rewarding the accomplishments of all students.	19	4.11	0.84	405
There are effective supports in place to assist students who are in jeopardy of academic failure.	23	3.91	1.03	405
I emphasize the importance of effort with students.	47	4.72	0.52	404
I have the skills necessary to meet the needs of all learners in my classroom.	16	4.12	0.85	385
All staff in our school hold high expectations for student learning.	25	3.98	0.96	402
I believe that I can positively impact student performance.	49	4.59	0.53	399
Students are held accountable for doing quality work.	7	3.73	1.07	397

district	school_name	source	percentile	mean	std_dev	n
MIDWEST SD	MIDWEST MIDDLE SCHOOL	fac	20	4.04	0.54	48

Parent Efficacy & Expectations

The efficacy and expectations scale from the parent Advance Questionnaire identifies the degree to which students believe that they are capable of impacting student achievement. The Parent scale for Efficacy & Expectations consists of five questions. The original questions and a summary of district responses follow:

Parent	percentile	mean	std_dev	n
My child's opinions are valued by teachers and administrators.	51	3.54	0.86	2173
My child's teachers are good teachers.	50	4.11	0.73	2184
My child's teachers expect very good work from my child.	43	4.24	0.68	2172
The school recognizes the accomplishments of my child.	33	3.83	0.85	2191
I know what my child's teachers expect in school.	45	3.98	0.79	2190

parents	school_name	source	percentile	mean	std_dev	n
MIDWEST SD	MIDWEST MIDDLE SCHOOL	prt	17	3.71	0.60	259

Student Efficacy & Expectations

The efficacy and expectations scale from the student (grade 3 and older) Advance Questionnaire identifies the degree to which students believe that they are capable of impacting student achievement. The Student scale for Efficacy & Expectations consists of six questions. The original questions and a summary of district and school responses follow:

Student	pctile	mean	std_dev	n
Being successful in school today will help me in my future.	21	4.44	0.93	3177
I can do well in school.	33	4.31	0.88	3187
My teachers think I can learn.	14	4.22	0.96	3188
My family believes that I can do well in school.	17	4.51	0.86	3184
My teachers expect very good work from me.	11	4.14	0.95	3186
I learn a lot in this school.	19	3.90	1.05	3182

district	school_name	source	pctile	mean	std_dev	n
MIDWEST SD	MIDWEST MIDDLE SCHOOL	std	1	4.13	0.72	615

Parent Safe & Orderly Environment

The safe and orderly environment scale from the parent Advance Questionnaire identifies the degree to which the school environment is safe and orderly. The Parent scale for Safe & Orderly Environment consists of six questions. The original questions and a summary of district responses along with the school's parents follow:

Parent	percentile	mean	std_dev	n
If I could, I would send my child to a different school.	20	3.52	1.21	2182
My school has clear procedures for handling school emergencies.	58	4.01	0.76	2183
I feel my child is safe at school.	40	4.03	0.82	2188
My child's school building is in good condition.	69	4.07	0.75	2198
There are students from my child's school that belong to street gangs.	13	3.65	1.05	2136
Our school has a program that teaches and reinforces student self-discipline and responsibility.	64	3.81	0.83	2159

district	school_name	source	percentile	mean	std_dev	n
MIDWEST SD	MIDWEST MIDDLE SCHOOL	prt	27	3.67	0.57	260

Vitae

The author/researcher earned his Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville in the 1982. After a 10 year career in professional soccer the author reenrolled in SIUE to complete his MA in Education. The author/researcher spent four years as a Physical Education/Health teacher in a suburban middle school. The author/researcher spent the following eight years as an Activities Director, Assistant Principal and Associate Principal of suburban high school. The past three years the author/researcher has served as the principal of the school of study.

Professional accomplishments include serving as President on the Executive Board of the St. Louis Association of Secondary School Principals, serving on the Juvenile Alternative Detention Initiative Task Force, and serving as the court liaison to the Teen Court Initiative in the City of St. Charles.