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Investigating Staff Morale in an Elementary School Setting

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Investigating Staff Morale in an

Elementary School Setting

by

Bethany Pendino

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
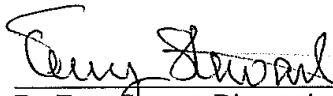
degree of

Doctor of Education

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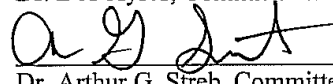
_____   1/20/12
Dr. Terry Stewart, Dissertation Chair   Date

_____   1/20/12
Dr. Deb Ayres, Committee Member   Date

_____   1/20/12
Dr. Arthur G. Streb, Committee Member   Date

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.

Full Legal Name: Bethany Jean Pendino

Signature: *Bethany Jean Pendino*   Date: 1-20-12

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Most importantly, thank you to the One who gives me all the abilities, ideas, motivation, resources, and blessings that I have. I owe all the credit to Jesus Christ.

How can I say thanks for the things
You have done for me?
Things so undeserved yet you gave
To prove your love for me
The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude
All that I am, and ever hope to be
I owe it all to thee.

(from *My Tribute* by Andrae Crouch)

Abstract

The way that employees feel about their workplaces and their jobs has implications not only for each individual but for the success of the workplace as well. In a school setting, investigating how teachers and other staff members feel about their jobs and their workplace and then seeking to improve employee morale may benefit schools.

This action research investigated staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The investigation examined how efforts to improve staff morale influenced staff members, students, and parents. Through staff surveys and focus groups, the researcher obtained information on staff members' feelings and attitudes related to the workplace, their suggestions for improving morale, and their views of changes in staff morale following the implementation of staff member suggestions. Parent surveys provided information on parent perceptions of staff attitudes and actions. Student data on reading achievement and behavior pre and post intervention supplied information on the impact that staff morale changes had on students.

Data from the investigation revealed differences, both pre and post intervention, in agreement and disagreement with morale-related survey statements based on job types and years of experience in education. The results also showed an increase in agreement and a decrease in disagreement with morale-related statements following intervention. Comparing staff member absences pre and post intervention did not reveal any consistent trends. While

a decrease in the number of behavior referrals existed following intervention, reading

achievement data did not show any consistent trends following intervention. Parent surveys

showed that, both pre and post intervention, parents held a positive view of staff member

actions and attitudes.

The author suggests that future research should focus on expanding the research

setting and on investigating the impact that school administrators have on staff morale.

Using the results of the study, the author makes recommendations to schools wishing to

assess and improve staff morale.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Work occupies a significant amount of time for educators in the United States.   The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2009, individuals employed in full-time education and health services positions worked an average of 41.1 hours per week. In a survey that the National Education Organization (NEA) conducts every five years, the 2006 average work week for teachers was 37 hours (Status of the American Public School Teacher, 2010, p. 47), plus an average of 10 hours weekly spent after the required workday on instructional tasks (p. 49) and an additional 3.8 hours weekly on unpaid noninstructional activities, such as clubs and supervisory duties (p. 53). Results from the Bureau of Labor Statistic's American Time Use Survey indicated that in 2009, on an average day, 30% of teachers completed work-related tasks at home beyond their regular work hours at their workplaces. In addition, over 15% of teachers held an additional job in 2009 (Krantz-Kent, 2008, pp. 52-58). Many teachers in the United States are working more than 40 hours per week, spending additional time at home on work-related activities on weekdays and on the weekends, and in some cases, working additional jobs.

The way that people feel about work, this activity that occupies such a large portion of individuals' lives, does matter, according to Blanchard (2000), a leadership expert and author. In the foreword to Lundin, Paul, and Christensen's 2000 book, *Fish! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results*, Blanchard said the following:

> People spend about 75 percent of their adult waking time doing work-related activities—getting ready for work, traveling to work, working, contemplating work, and decompressing after work. If we spend that much time in that part of our lives, we ought to enjoy it and be energized by it. (pp. 9-10)

Fromm (1991) also claimed that the way employees feel about work matters, as their feelings can influence their performance at work, and he suggested that contented employees perform better at work than those who are not satisfied (p. 141).   He commented that "it doesn't make sense to spend five-sevenths of the week doing something you hate so that you can spend the other two-sevenths enjoying yourself" (p. 141). According to Fromm (1991), the easiest way to improve employee performance is to make work fun (p. 142).

Morale affects both individuals and organizations. Hacker (1997) explained that morale determines motivation at work, and she stated that there are significant payoffs for a company to build morale in the workplace (p.xiii). Bruce (2003) indicated that when morale is high, employees demonstrate greater creativity and are more motivated to do their best (pp. 41-42). In contrast, when employees do not feel that their managers and organization appreciate the work they do, their performance at work decreases.   Similarly, Deeprose (2007) stated that showing appreciation for employees by recognizing and rewarding their achievements directly contributes to "bottom-line results" (p. 3). A 2007 report called *6 Dumb Ways to Kill Employee Morale* from Progressive Business Publications (PBP) explained that when workplace morale decreases, employee productivity also decreases immediately and measurably (p.12).

When organizations make an effort to improve employee satisfaction, individuals and their organizations benefit. Sirota, Mischkind, and Meltzer (2005) believed that satisfying employee needs, which increases job satisfaction and morale, results in benefits for the workplace (p. xxiii). Using over 30 years of data, the authors have found that enthusiastic employees—those who have the highest levels of satisfaction and morale—are higher performing than other employees (p. 34). Sirota et al. (2005) agreed with Herb

Kelleher, founder of Southwest airlines, who expressed the importance of how employees feel about their jobs and workplaces when he said, "…there is one key to profitability and stability during either a boom or bust economy: employee morale" (p. 33). Addressing the potential implications of teacher satisfaction on student achievement, Vail (2005) indicated that, while there is a lack of current research in this area, "common sense tells you, however, that supported and contented teachers will do a better job than their dissatisfied colleagues" (p. 6) and that when adults are productive and happy, their students are more likely to experience greater achievement and contentment.

Historical Perspective on Morale

Workplace morale and job satisfaction have been studied for years. In 1966, Herzberg described his theory that five factors most strongly influence job satisfaction. The factors he described include enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from doing the work itself, the opportunity to take on responsibility, the opportunity for advancement, receiving recognition for a job well done, and achievement in the workplace (p.72). These factors all relate to what the employee does, and Herzberg (1966) explained that they are important for developing long-term satisfaction (p.74). He went on to describe factors that can lead to job dissatisfaction. These factors are primarily environmental and are related to the situation in which an employee does his or her work. The dissatisfiers that Herzberg described include working conditions, salary, administration, supervision, and relationships at work (p.74). Meeting these basic needs does not lead to increased satisfaction at work, but simply helps prevent dissatisfaction (pp.75-76).

Shortly after Herzberg (1966) described his theory of job satisfaction, Litwin and Stringer (1968) discussed employee motivation, or goal-directed behavior, as a product of the

workplace climate, with an organization's management playing a significant role in determining the climate (p.6). Litwin and Stringer also described employees' needs for achievement, power, and feelings of belonging in the workplace in order to achieve satisfaction (p.8). The authors described ways that climate influences people, explaining that "different climates stimulate different kinds of motivation" (p. 188) and that climate influences attitudes, relationships, feelings of satisfaction, and job performance (p.188).

Decades later, the issues of workplace morale and job satisfaction remain topics of interest. Fromm (1991) included in his *10 Commandments of Business* suggestions for building workplace morale by treating employees well and making the workplace fun as ways to improve customer service and employee productivity (pp.13-14). In *The High Cost of Low Morale*, Hacker (1997) discussed the potential impact of low employee morale in the workplace and ways to improve morale (p.xiii). Bruce (2003) explained the importance of periodically assessing workplace morale and then addressing issues brought to light (p.67) in her book *Building a High Morale Workplace*. In *The Enthusiastic Employee*, Sirota et al. (2005) used over 30 years of data to describe how to develop enthusiastic employees—those with the highest levels of satisfaction and morale—and how enthusiastic employees benefit companies (p.xxiii). In *Fish! A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results*, Lundin et al. (2000) encouraged workplaces to promote fun and active engagement with customers and with each other in order to improve employee morale and customer satisfaction (pp.62-69).   Paul and Reck (2006) explained how to build employee enthusiasm and morale so that employees will consistently desire to be outstanding performers in *Revved! An Incredible Way to Rev Up Your Workplace and Achieve Amazing Results* (p.vii). In the 2007 book *How to Recognize and Reward Employees: 150 Ways to Inspire Peak*

Performance, Deeprose described specific ways to acknowledge employee accomplishments and achievements in order to increase employee performance and productivity (p.1). Emmerich's 2009 book *Thank God It's Monday: How to Create a Workplace You and Your Customers Love* explained how to improve employee attitudes, enthusiasm, and satisfaction in the workplace as ways of improving the service provided to customers (p.2).

Using motivators from Herzberg's theory of job satisfaction, Lester (1990) described *Fifty Ways to Improve Teacher Morale*, organizing suggestions into categories of achievement, advancement, recognition, responsibility, and work itself (pp.274-275). In their investigation titled *Causes and Effects of Low Morale Among Secondary Teachers*, Briggs and Richardson (1992) attempted to explain causes, internal reactions to, and external reactions to low morale with 24 descriptors identified by study participants, and the authors provided suggestions for building high morale (pp.88-91). Herzberg (2003) revisited his discussion of satisfiers and dissatisfiers related to work (pp. 90-92) in *One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?* Vail (2005) offered 10 specific suggestions for improving teacher morale in *Climate Control: Ten Ways to Make Your Schools Great Places to Work and Learn*. Her suggestions included improving school climate, supporting and empowering teachers, recognizing and rewarding staff accomplishments, maintaining facilities, and dealing with student behavior issues (pp. 16-19). In *Nurturing Teachers in a Famine*, Schmidt (2005) emphasized the need to provide teachers with recognition, build relationships with staff members, reward teachers, and develop rituals that unite the school staff as ways of building morale and encouraging teachers to persist in the difficult yet important job they do (pp. 13-15). MetLife's report, *The American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success* (2009), provided the results of an annual survey of teachers related to a variety of teacher

characteristics and perceptions, including teacher satisfaction. Workplace morale has even

appeared as a topic of interest in current news media, as in Goltz's March 11, 2010 New

York Times article *The Secret to Having Happy Employees* in which he expressed that even

one unhappy employee can have a significant negative impact on a company. The continued

presence of the issues of job satisfaction and morale in current literature and research confirm

that these topics remain relevant today.

Statement of the Problem

While workplace morale continues to be a topic of interest, little research is available

on improving staff morale in school settings and on the impact that staff morale can have on

students (Vail, 2005, p.16). The literature that currently exists related to school settings

frequently describes the significance of morale, discusses factors that influence morale, or

provides suggestions for improving morale. Briggs and Richardson (1992), for example,

surveyed teachers and administrators to identify causes of low morale as well as both internal

and external reactions to low morale. The authors then provided suggestions for improving

morale, based on these findings (p.90), but data was not available on the implementation of

these suggestions.   Similarly, Bivona (2002) described a survey of teachers in a school

setting. The survey asked teachers a variety of questions related to their perceptions of their

workplace, teaching, and their job satisfaction. Bivona then suggested several improvements

that schools could make, based on the survey results (p. 24), but the study did not include

implementation of these suggestions. Lester (1990, pp. 274-275), Schmidt (2005, p.13-15),

and Vail (2005, pp. 16-19) offered numerous suggestions for improving morale, with some of

their suggestions having anecdotal support; however, data was not available on the impact of

implementing these suggestions.

The purpose of this study was to investigate staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School in the Northwoods School District (pseudonyms for the school and district names). This study assessed staff morale during the first semester of the school year, used staff input to develop and implement measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale, and reassessed Sparkling Springs staff morale during the final quarter of the school year to determine if those efforts to improve morale had any effect on staff morale. This investigation also examined student outcome measures to investigate the potential impact for Sparkling Springs students of attempting to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Research Setting

Sparkling Springs Elementary School is an elementary school serving approximately 400 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Approximately 98% of the student population is black, while the other 2% is white (School Accountability Report Card, 2008-2011). Sparkling Springs employed 46 full-time staff members during the 2010-2011 school year. Of the 46 total, 19 were certified classroom teachers, 12 were certified non-classroom teachers (reading specialists, counselor, instructional specialist, librarian, special education staff, art teacher, music teacher, physical education teachers), 14 were classified staff members (non-certified employees, including teacher clerks, building aides, secretary, nurse, custodians, cafeteria workers), and one was an administrator. Sparkling Springs Elementary School is one of 20 elementary schools in the Northwoods School District, a large suburban district.

Rationale for the Study

Student achievement is a primary focus in education today. Beginning with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and moving even more to the forefront of the public's attention with the *No Child Left Behind Ac*t of 2001, the focus in education has shifted from processes to results (Wong & Nicotera, 2007, p.3). Bernhardt (2004) emphasized the need for schools to gather and analyze data in order to understand the whole school system, and student achievement data is one type of data that can contribute to an understanding of the entire school system in order to promote continuous improvement (p.13). Bernhardt stated, "We want data about all parts of the school gathered and analyzed on a regular basis to understand the entire system, not just student achievement data" (p.13). Data about staff morale or staff perceptions of the school system can contribute to an understanding of the system as a whole (p.22).

Gathering data about teacher perceptions of their job and workplace is an important step in understanding how schools function and in guiding change. As Bernhardt (2004) stated, "Perceptions are important since people act in congruence with what they believe, perceive, or think about different topics" (p. 23), and "We act upon those perceptions everyday as if they are reality" (p. 54). Bernhardt emphasized that teacher thoughts and beliefs affect teacher actions, which influence the learning that takes place in the classroom (p. 55). Staff morale and motivation have the potential to affect staff behavior, which in turn has the potential to influence student performance and achievement. First understanding teacher perceptions, then increasing awareness and providing experiences that may lead to changes in perceptions, holds potential for affecting students (p.54-55), as this study sought to address.

Research Questions

       This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, and what factors do Sparkling Springs staff members believe contribute to their morale?

2. How do staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School believe that the morale of Sparkling Springs staff members can be improved?

3. How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect Sparkling Springs staff morale and staff member absences during the course of a school year?

4. How do efforts to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale affect the reading achievement and behavior of Sparkling Springs students?

5. How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect parent perception of Sparkling Springs staff morale?

Hypotheses

       The investigator also designed this research to determine if there were statistically significant differences between staff morale for employees with different job types (certified classroom teachers, other certified teachers, and classified staff members) and between staff morale for employees with different numbers of years of employment in the field of education. The investigation also examined whether or not there was a statistically significant difference in the overall level of morale and in individual staff members' morale pre and post intervention. As a means of investigating the potential impact that staff morale

may have on students, this research included a comparison of student outcome measures--

using reading levels and behavior referral data--before, during, and after implementation of

efforts to improve morale. The study also compared staff absences pre and post intervention.

Alternate Hypothesis #1. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings

of classroom teachers, certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members at

Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

Alternate Hypothesis #2. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings

of Sparkling Springs staff members with one to five years of experience in education,

Sparkling Springs staff members with six to 10 years of experience in education, Sparkling

Springs staff members with 11-15 years of experience in education, and Sparkling Springs

staff members with 16 or more years of experience in education.

Alternate Hypothesis #3. An increase in Sparkling Springs staff member morale, as

measured by the survey, will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-

generated measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff member morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #4. A decrease in the number of Sparkling Springs staff

member absences within a school year will exist following the implementation of Sparkling

Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #5. An increase in the percent of Sparkling Springs students in

first through fifth grade reading at or above grade level will occur following implementation

of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

 Alternate Hypothesis #6. A decrease in the number of behavior referrals for

Sparkling Springs students in kindergarten through fifth grade will occur following

implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Limitations of the Study

The investigator identified 12 potential limitations, or threats to the internal validity of this study. Researchers need to be aware of limitations when interpreting study results (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 166). Identifying such limitations is also an essential step in helping researchers to effectively control these threats to internal validity (p. 167).

Subject characteristics. In this study, the investigator invited all full-time staff members to participate and all parents who attended a Sparkling Springs PTA meeting to participate. These groups served as their own controls, as the investigator compared pre and post intervention data. While random sampling is typically desirable in research, action research like this study focuses on specific groups because generalizing results is not the goal (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.594). For statistical analyses of staff survey data, the investigator used all responses from the self-selected participant group—all those who returned surveys—since using a random sample would have significantly reduced the number of responses available for analysis.   For qualitative analysis of parent surveys, the investigator used all returned surveys. A small response rate existed for parent surveys, which resulted in a decrease in reliability of results; however, the surveys returned still provided valuable insight into parent perceptions.   The investigator used random samples for comparison of student reading data.

Loss of subjects. The investigator provided a two-week period for completion of both the first and second staff surveys and the investigator sent an e-mail reminder during the two-week period to minimize the number of individuals who did not complete the survey due

to absence, conflicting activities, or forgetting about the survey. In addition, staff member

participants completed the survey at the beginning and the end of the same school year.

Conducting both surveys during the same school year helped to minimize the risk of loss of

participants because staff members in the school setting do not typically leave their jobs

during the school year.   Parent participants also completed both surveys within the same

school year to minimize the risk of loss of participants.

Location.   Staff members had the opportunity to complete their surveys in any

location at school or away from school to minimize the threat of location on the internal

validity of this research. The investigator held focus groups in her classroom at Sparkling

Springs Elementary School, which could influence the responses and suggestions that

individuals provided; however, the investigator chose this location for its convenience to

potential participants.

Instrumentation. This study used teacher-developed instruments, as is typical in

action research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.595). The methods for coding and scoring the

surveys and for compiling the results from the focus groups were consistent to avoid

instrument decay (p.170).

Data collector characteristics. In this study, the investigator was the only individual

collecting data, which minimized the internal threat from data collector characteristics

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.170).

Data collector bias. Action research "studies suffer particularly from the possibility

of data collector bias, because the data collector is well aware of the intent of the study"

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, pp.594-595). The data collector in this research believed that

morale was low at Sparkling Springs Elementary School and that efforts to treat employees

well, include staff members in decision-making, recognize and reward employees, and add fun to the workplace should improve morale. To minimize the potential impact of data collector bias on the internal validity, the investigator standardized all data collection and analysis procedures and only the investigator collected the data (p. 170). While the investigator worked at Sparkling Springs Elementary School during the period of the study, she did not serve in any supervisory capacity.

Testing. The administration of the first survey in this investigation may have alerted staff members that morale was the topic of interest in this investigation and that interventions that followed the survey were designed to influence morale. The investigator did not consider this a significant threat to the internal validity of this study, because as participatory action research, staff members needed to know that morale was the issue of interest, and it was desirable for staff members to think about, discuss, and seek ways to influence morale.

History. Since the participants in this study all worked in and attended the same school, events potentially influencing responses of subjects would have been likely to affect many or all participants and would not affect group-to-group comparison since this study's participants served as their own control.

Maturation. Maturation is a greater threat for very young subjects (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.173), so maturation did not pose a significant threat to internal validity in the parent and staff portions of this study because these participants were adults and the span of the study was one school year.   The use of repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) for student reading data helped to address some concerns related to student maturation.

Attitude of subjects. All participants in this study received the same interventions, since this investigation's participants were their own controls. While action research studies may be likely to have attitudinal effects (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.595), attitudes based on different treatment of different groups should not have posed a significant threat to internal validity, since different groups did not receive different interventions in this study.

Regression. This threat to internal validity is most likely in "a group that is extremely low or high in its preintervention performance" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.175). Initial staff and student data represented a wide range of results, rather than extremely low or high results, so regression was not as likely of a threat to internal validity as if the results had been extreme.

Implementation. Studies involving action research may be vulnerable to implementation effects (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 595); however, in this study, since all staff members received the same interventions and since participants served as their own controls, the possibility of implementation variables influencing results was minimal.

Definition of Terms

Certified Employees: Certified or "certificated" employees are those individuals "holding valid Missouri educator certificates that are issued by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education" (PEERS, 2010-2011, p. 2). For the purpose of this study, certified employees were divided into two groups—classroom teachers and non-classroom teachers.

Classified Employees: Classified employees are individuals for whom certification is not required, including secretaries, teachers' aides, maintenance workers, custodians, bus

drivers, food service workers, and any other positions not requiring teacher certification (PSRS/PEERS, 2009, p.9).

Climate: In an organization, climate is "a set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in this environment and assumed to influence their motivation and behavior" (Litwin & Stringer, 1968, p. 1).

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA): The DRA is a diagnostic tool used for guiding instruction and for identifying reading levels of students in kindergarten through eighth grade (Developmental Reading Assessment, 2011).

Job Satisfaction: Job satisfaction is the degree to which one has a positive attitude toward one's job (Imber & Neidt, 1990, p.73).

Motivation: Motivation is an individual's goal directed behavior (Litwin & Stringer, 1968, p.7).

Productivity: In the workplace, productivity involves "an environment in which organizations maximize the results of everybody on the team" (PBP Executive Reports, 2007, p.1).

Workplace Morale: Workplace morale involves the attitudes of an individual toward his or her work and workplace (Bruce, 2003, p.2).

Summary

Workplace morale, motivation, and satisfaction have been topics of concern for years and continue to be of interest to organizations, managers, and employees. A need exists for more research on staff morale in school settings and on factors that influence staff morale, since the morale and satisfaction of employees has the potential to impact employee

performance. Furthermore, in the school setting, staff performance is likely to affect student outcomes, so this issue is worth examining. This study assessed morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School during the first semester of the school year and used staff input to develop and implement measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale. This research then reassessed Sparkling Springs staff morale during the final quarter of the school year to determine if those efforts to improve morale had any effect on staff morale. The investigation also examined student outcome measures to investigate the potential impact for Sparkling Springs students of attempting to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

What is Morale?

The term morale sometimes refers to characteristics of individuals, and at other times, morale represents group attitudes and feelings. Evans (1992) explained that many authors and researchers focus solely on group morale, which may be described in terms of common objectives or attitudes of those belonging to a group (para. 7) while individual morale may relate to ambitions, goals, and self-perception of individuals in specific situations (para. 44). Hacker (1997) described morale as "attitudes of individuals and groups toward their work, their environment, their managers, and the business" (p.xiv). She believed that "when morale is high, it's worth its weight in gold. When morale is low, the cost is tremendous" (p.xiii). Bruce (2003) explained that morale is the way that an individual feels about both his work and the organization for which he works. Bruce indicated that while individuals with low morale may do what is required of them, individuals with high morale are committed to their jobs and participate in work with enthusiasm (p. 2). Sirota et al. (2005) expanded on this idea by describing four levels of employee morale, with the highest level being enthusiasm, followed by satisfaction, neutrality, and finally anger as the lowest level of morale. When satisfaction or neutrality exists, employees generally do what is expected of them. The highest and lowest levels of morale are those that drive employees to action— anger, in ways that may actually harm the organization, and enthusiasm, in ways that benefit and bring credit to the organization or employer (pp.34-43).

The terms morale, motivation, and satisfaction frequently refer to similar things, with job satisfaction affecting workplace morale, which then influences employee motivation. Herzberg (1966) described motivation as a product of job satisfaction (p.71). Litwin and

Stringer (1968) described motivation as goal-directed behavior in which the goal may be a need or a want (p. 7). Similarly, Haasen and Shea (2003) explained motivation as an inner force guiding actions (p.3), and that being in control of an activity, mastering challenges through use of skills, and the fun and enjoyment that results from this are factors that promote motivation (p.18).   Emphasizing the close relationship between job satisfaction and employee morale, Evans (1992) described how these entities "continually interact and, by this process, present the illusion of being one" (para. 37). Echoing a similar idea, Hacker (1997) asserted that employee morale determines employee motivation (p.xiii), while Bruce (2003) explained that morale has a direct impact on an employee's motivation and job performance (p.4). Likewise, Sirotaet al. (2005) stated that high morale is a result of employee satisfaction, which results from satisfying the basic needs of employees (p.xxiii). The use of these terms in the literature suggests that job satisfaction influences employee morale, which in turn, affects employee motivation at work.

Why Does Morale Matter?

        Impact of morale on employees. Individuals with high morale may exhibit many positive characteristics. Bruce (2003) associated high morale with characteristics such as confidence, generosity, hope, cheerfulness, high self-esteem, persistence, and positive attitudes.   In the workplace, this includes loyalty to an organization, and employees supporting each other to work together toward meaningful goals (p.12). Conversely, low morale can lead to high turnover, decreases in employee performance, and employee disinterest in work (Hacker, 1997, p.xiv).

        Low morale can lead to undesirable characteristics in a school culture, and individuals can also experience negative effects of low morale. Briggs and Richardson

(1992) discussed both internal and external reactions of teachers to low morale. These researchers asked the teachers participating in their study to identify descriptors of low workplace morale, and the selected descriptors were categorized as causes of low morale, internal reactions to low morale, and external reactions to low morale (p.87). The internal reaction to low morale most frequently selected by teachers in this survey was frustration. Other internal reactions to low morale identified by teachers included fear of supervision, insecurity, confusion, feelings of futility, lack of confidence, feelings of resistance to change, and excessive teacher absences (p. 90). The external reactions identified in this study were equally as undesirable and negative, with backbiting and open hostility as the ones most frequently selected (p.91). Other external reactions to low morale identified by teachers included spitefulness and fighting in the workplace, high turnover rates, bitterness and anger, formation of cliques, and lack of consideration for others, with at least 22% of participants selecting each of these characteristics (p.91).   These internal and external effects of low morale are clearly not beneficial or desirable in schools or to individuals within the schools.

Employee performance. Employee morale can affect employee performance, and employee performance can affect employee morale. Sirota et al. (2005) explained that there is a reciprocal relationship between employee morale and employee performance, as they affect each other (p.47). Hacker (1997) stated that morale is "tied to profits, efficiency, quality, cooperation, productivity, and financial competitiveness" (p.xiv) and that when morale is low, employee behavior and performance are affected and attendance and attitudes may be poor (p.xv). Employee productivity is closely related to employee morale (p.72). Low morale has a high price, according to Bruce (2003), including the cost of employee turnover, poor employee attitudes, decreases in productivity and performance, low employee

self-esteem, increased absenteeism, and poor customer service (p.83). O'Toole and Lawler

(2006) concurred with the findings that low job satisfaction can lead to high levels of

turnover and absenteeism, along with poor customer service (p.107).

Impact on students. Student achievement is a primary emphasis for schools today.

Starting with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the government and the public became more

concerned with the results of education. Again emphasizing the importance of results, the

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 continued the shift in the focus of education from

processes to results (Wong & Nicotera, 2007, p. 3).   Various ideas exist about factors that

affect results in education. Socioeconomic status and minority status are commonly cited as

factors that affect student achievement (Klingle, 1990, p. 282; Rothstein, 2008, p. 8; Tajalli

& Opheim, 2005, p.52), but even when disadvantages in these areas exist, teacher

characteristics can contribute significantly to improving student performance (Tajalli &

Opheim, 2005, p.52). Researchers have studied parent involvement as a potential factor in

student achievement. Research suggests that parent involvement has the potential to impact

academic achievement and can benefit students by building confidence, sending a positive

message about education to students, improving student behavior at school, and helping to

hold schools to higher standards. However, data on the direct impact of parent involvement

on academic achievement are not conclusive (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007, pp.

361-362; Domina, 2005, pp. 245-246; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005, pp. 13-16; Sheldon

& Epstein, 2005, pp.203-204;). In addition, teacher characteristics can influence the level of

parent involvement that teachers solicit and receive (Deplanty et al., 2007, p.362). Educators

often blame large class size for lack of student achievement and frequently suggest reducing

class size as a measure to improve student achievement. Research has attempted to address

the relationship between class size and student achievement, and results suggest that smaller

class size may offer some academic and behavior benefits for students in early grade levels

and for ethnic minority students and economically disadvantaged students, as well as for

those with significant academic needs (Blatchford, Bassett, Goldstein, & Martin, 2003,

p.724; Jepsen & Rivkin, 2009, p.247; Robinson, 1990, pp.82-86). Emphasizing the

importance of the teacher, not class size alone, Robinson (1990) and Blatchford et al. (2003)

also noted that teacher practices may or may not take full advantage of a smaller class size

and that teachers must appropriately adjust teaching practices to fit the size of the class in

order for students to attain the greatest academic benefit possible. While multiple factors

may be important and may influence student achievement, the teacher is consistently a

significant factor in determining student success (The Leadership and Learning Center, n.d.,

p.193). Porter-Magee (2004) discussed the lasting positive impact that good teachers have

on students, as well as the lasting negative impact that poor teachers can have on students

(p.27), while Goldhaber (2002) believed that providing students with good teachers is the

most important things that a school can do (para. 5). Wong and Wong (2005) stated that

improving student achievement is simple—"Improve the teacher and you improve the

student" (para. 1).

     If teachers have such potential to impact students, then teacher morale has the

potential to affect student morale and student achievement. Among nine factors identified in

research that affect student learning, student motivation and classroom learning morale are

included (Nelson, 1990, p.3), which seem likely to be influenced by teacher morale. Vail

(2005) explained that while there is a lack of current research on the relationship between

teacher morale and student achievement, it makes sense that satisfied teachers will perform

better in their jobs than teachers who are dissatisfied. She stated that teacher attitudes affect

student attitudes, and that schools with happy and productive adults will have happy and

productive students (p.16). Teachers who feel good about themselves and their work are

more likely to find ways to address the needs of all students, even those with learning or

behavior concerns, and students and teachers alike want to be in this type of environment

(p.19).

       Employee absenteeism. Low morale in workplaces has been associated with

excessive employee absences (Briggs & Richardson, 1992, p.90; Bruce, 2003, p.83), and

excessive teacher absences have the potential to impact students, schools, and districts.

Teacher absenteeism costs school districts money, since districts must pay for substitute

teachers (Woods & Montagno, 1997, p.308), with a total cost for substitute teachers in public

schools in the United States estimated at $4 billion per year (Black, 2009, p.48). Beyond the

financial impact of teacher absenteeism is the potential impact on student achievement.

Black cited a 2008 investigation of teacher absences by Raegen Miller of the Center for

American Progress. This investigation found a "significant loss in student achievement"

(p.49) for students whose teacher was absent 10 or more days in a school year. Miller,

Murnane, and Willett (2008) explained that when teachers are absent, substitute teachers,

who are exempt from the highly qualified teacher provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act

of 2001, may possess low skill levels and may have limited knowledge of individual student

needs (p.73). Woods and Montagno (1997) stated that most of the work left for substitutes is

"busy" work (p.309), and that the "quality and reliability of substitutes is unknown" (p.308).

Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, and Ehrenberg (1991) utilized data from over 700 school

districts in New York and found that lower teacher absenteeism led to lower student

absenteeism, which had both financial and academic implications—financially, because state

aid was based on student attendance in New York during the time of this study; and

academically, because lower student absenteeism led to higher test scores (p.100). The

impact of teacher absences may have an especially large impact on the students with the

greatest needs, as teachers tend to be absent more frequently in schools with the poorest

students and those who are the most academically in need (Norton, 1998, para. 15).

Improving school climate and employee morale has the potential to improve employee

attendance, because "employees who believed that the organization valued their

contributions and cared about their well-being tended to be absent less often than others"

(Norton, 1998, para. 16), and "when job satisfaction is positive, staff personnel are motivated

toward serving the organization and goal achievement. Such an attitude leads to improved

attendance" (Norton, 1998, para.18).

Examples from other professions. Outside the field of education, job satisfaction

significantly affects employee performance. Roberts and Savage (1973) explained that some

managers believe that dissatisfied employees perform poorly. They also described how job

satisfaction is negatively correlated with turnover and absenteeism.   Excessive absenteeism

and high turnover rates are costly to employers, so finding ways to boost morale and keep

employees satisfied may, over time, save money for organizations and employers (p.82).

Emphasizing the relationship between morale and employee performance, Hacker (1997)

expressed that morale determines motivation, so employees with high morale will be

motivated to perform better than those with low morale (p.72). Sirota et al. (2005) drew on

over 30 years of research with over four million employees when they asserted that business

performance is about 20% higher in employees with high morale.   They also claimed that a

positive correlation exists between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (p.45).

Sirota et al. explained that the enthusiastic employee, an employee with the highest level of

morale, produces more than is required, seeks ways to improve, encourages co-workers to

perform at high levels, assists co-workers, and interacts with customers in ways that reflect

well on the organization. An angry employee, one with the lowest level of morale, may treat

customers poorly; refuse to cooperate with co-workers; have frequent absences; and, in

extreme cases, may steal, become violent, or even attempt to sabotage an organization

(pp.41-43). Emmerich (2009) claimed that all success stems from enthusiasm, and without

enthusiasm, nothing of significance happens in an organization. Finding ways to improve

enthusiasm or morale, then, leads to significant payoffs for the employer, while failure to

address morale concerns can have a significant negative impact (p.100). Fromm (1991)

commented that "great managers understand that in order to improve customer service, they

have to improve employee morale" (p.15).

What Influences Morale in the Workplace?

      Recognition. Lack of recognition for effort and accomplishments can adversely

affect employee morale. Briggs and Richardson (1992) discussed their survey of teachers in

which lack of recognition was the most common cause of low morale (p.88). Supporting this

finding, Bivona (2002) stated that 75% of teachers surveyed in her study disagreed or

strongly disagreed that staff members at their school received recognition for doing their jobs

well. Bivona (2002) cited this lack of recognition as a risk factor for teacher morale (p.11).

      Experience. Experience may influence workplace morale. Bivona (2002) discussed

findings of her survey of teacher perceptions that suggest a significant difference between the

morale of teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience and those with less than

10 years of teaching experience. She stated that the more experienced teachers are more

satisfied and have higher morale than the less experienced teachers, with 78% of the less

experienced teachers surveyed indicating that are unhappy and that they plan to leave the

profession of teaching or are undecided about leaving. Bivona offered possible explanations

for the lower morale of less experienced teachers, based on survey results. She claimed that

less experienced teachers might be less efficient, and therefore spend more after-school and

weekend time on school-related tasks.   She also explained that less experienced teachers

may spend more time on student behavior issues, as they are not as skilled in classroom

management as the more experienced teachers (p.19).

> **Management.** Managers and management practices within an organization may

influence the morale of employees, as "the immediate supervisor is all-important when it

comes to any individual employee's output and morale" (PBP Executive Reports, 2007, p.1),

and "bosses are probably in some manner, shape, or form contributing to low morale if it

exists" (p.8). Kroth (2007) affirmed the manager's importance when he said that "a manager

has more opportunity than any other organizational influence to directly motivate an

employee. He or she has the most power to set the department's organizational climate"

(p.7). Kroth explained that most people begin new jobs with excitement, hope, anticipation,

dreams for the future, and the desire to do great work, and poor managers can ruin these

positive feelings very quickly (p.17). Sirota et al. (2005) concurred with Kroth's belief that

most employees beginning a new job are naturally motivated.   Employees bring with them

excitement and enthusiasm.   One of the key responsibilities, then, of management, is to not

destroy this motivation.   Sirota et al. stated that management frequently kills enthusiasm

(pp.xxix-xxx).   Litwin and Stringer (1968) also emphasized the great influence of managers

by stating that workplace climate is a significant factor in determining employee motivation and morale, and the manager in a workplace is a major determinant of the climate (p.6). Stressing the significance of the climate that managers create in an organization, Langley and Jacobs (2006) argued that "a good climate encourages people to want to come to work, go the extra mile when it comes time for an extra meeting, or react positively when asked to cover a class for a colleague who is absent because of an emergency" (p.89).

   Other factors. Many workplaces share other common challenges that affect employee morale. Evans (1992) explained that several factors commonly believed to contribute to low teacher morale in Britain include changes in education legislation, low pay, and low status; however, she acknowledged that there is a lack of current research on teacher morale and its causes, so most of the claims regarding morale are "based upon common-sense reasoning" (p.161).   Bruce (2003) explained that few resources and increasing demands in the workplace can affect morale levels (p.97).   She also discussed how rumors, whining and complaining, defensive attitudes, and resistance to change can be barriers to positive morale.   Resistance to authority can also create morale challenges in the workplace, as can personal problems that employees bring to work with them (pp.85-95). Sirota et al. (2005) identified from their over 30 years of survey collection another common issue affecting morale in workplaces. They explained that when an organization does not deal appropriately with poor performers, morale within the organization suffers (p.234). Emmerich (2009) concurred with this finding when she stated that other employees perform better without poor performers because they no longer have to work in a "toxic waste dump of attitude" (p.146).

How Can Morale Be Measured?

Importance of measurement. Whether an organization chooses to use formal, standardized measurement tools or informal surveys or discussions, understanding morale in an environment is essential before an organization can make any attempt to address morale issues. Roberts and Savage (1973) pointed out that gathering information on employee satisfaction and morale is valuable only if an organization is willing to address morale problems, should they exist (p.82). They also stated that, because any measure of job satisfaction has some bias and is imperfect, a valid assessment of job satisfaction should incorporate more than one measure (p.84).

Formal measurement. Some standardized tools for measuring morale exist. Coughlan and Froemel (1971) described and compared two commonly used standardized measures for assessing morale.   The Purdue Teacher Opinionaire is a 100-item survey that addresses 10 factors related to teacher satisfaction.   The School Survey is a 120-item survey that addresses 14 factors related to teacher attitudes. The Purdue Teacher Opinionaire uses a four-point scale, while the School Survey uses a three-point scale. Both tools address many similar issues, such as workload, facilities, materials, curriculum and instruction, administration, community relations, rapport with colleagues, and salary (pp.2-5).

Informal measurement. While using a standardized measure is one way to assess morale, informal means for measuring morale also can provide valuable information. Bruce (2003) believed that there was "only one surefire way to know if employee morale is really positive and strong throughout your company—ask the people who actually work there" (p.66). She provided a simple 13-item checklist that employers may use as a morale audit. Employees rate their agreement level with statements on the checklist. In addition to directly

asking employees whether or not morale is high in their workplace, items on the checklist include statements about management practices and attitudes, organization values, employee attitudes, and the individual's sense of fulfillment and enjoyment at work (p.68). An employer can easily create a checklist or modify the checklist that Bruce provided to apply to a specific workplace. Bruce explained that it is necessary to conduct a morale audit periodically, so a quick checklist makes regular assessments of morale possible.   She explained that, despite its great importance, many managers do not even attempt to measure morale, and this is dangerous, because little problems grow into bigger problems over time. (p.67). A morale audit, then, is the first step in addressing issues before they become significant problems (p.70).

Agreeing with Bruce's encouragement to managers to investigate morale in the workplace, Vail (2005) indicated that asking teachers and staff about morale, either through surveys or by talking, is a simple way to alert administrators to potential morale problems and to allow employees to provide input and to be heard (p.19). She also acknowledged that while a school's climate has a significant impact on teacher morale, it can be difficult to accurately describe or define the climate.   She suggested considering the energy level of those entering the school, topics of discussion at staff meetings, whether or not there is a sense of collaboration in the building, and messages at the school about what is truly important as ways of understanding the culture and climate of the school (p.17-18). Hacker (1997) concurred with Vail's suggestion to solicit employee opinions. She suggested using a survey to gain information about attitudes of employees related to the workplace, the organization, and their specific jobs (p.102).

How Can Morale Be Improved?

If a morale audit suggests that low morale exists in an environment, the next logical step is to formulate a plan to address the morale issue, since "having information about employee satisfaction is futile unless the firm is willing to take positive steps where there is low morale" (Roberts & Savage, 1973. p.82).   While it may not be possible to address every issue that contributes to dissatisfaction or low morale among employees, many actions can improve morale, increase satisfaction, and decrease dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Vail (2005) made a number of suggestions for improving school climate.   She emphasized the importance of addressing morale issues and negativity early because the longer these issues exist, the more difficult they are to change (p.17). She stressed the importance of providing support and assistance to new teachers, as low morale in an individual's first few years of teaching can cause new teachers to leave the field of education (p.16-17). Vail also expressed that teachers need to feel respected as professionals (p.19) and must feel that they have a voice in decision-making in the workplace (p.17-18). Appropriately addressing disruptive student behavior is another way that administrators can help ensure a climate with positive morale (p.18). Recognizing and rewarding staff members, encouraging them, and showing appreciation helps to improve morale as well (p.18).

Schmidt (2005) echoed similar themes when she contended that providing recognition to teachers improves morale. This recognition may include verbal praise, written notes, or public praise (p.14). Rewarding teachers, even with low-cost or no-cost rewards, shows teachers that they are appreciated and helps to build morale (p.15). Schmidt also believed that providing opportunities for staff members to build relationships with one another and

developing traditions and rituals within the school community can help to improve the school culture and build positive feelings among staff (pp.14-15).

Utilizing many similar ideas, Lester listed 50 specific suggestions for improving teacher morale. Ideas included recognizing teachers for their accomplishments, providing opportunities for achievement and advancement, and including teachers in decision-making and problem-solving by giving teachers greater responsibility and opportunities for professional growth (pp.274-275).

Both within and outside the school setting, similar themes appeared repeatedly in research and literature about building morale. Recurring ideas include treating employees well, involving employees in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding employee achievements, making work fun, and encouraging personal responsibility for attitudes.

Treating employees well. Treating employees as people first is a significant way to improve morale. An early example illustrating the potential impact of treating individuals well involved the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne Plant during the 1920s and 1930s. Employees were involved in experiments that examined worker productivity as a function of changes in working conditions. Researchers found that employee productivity improved both when working conditions improved and when working conditions were made worse and offered as an explanation that the attention and recognition that employees received while participating in the experiment led to increased productivity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, 174).

Kroth (2007) emphasized to managers that "there is no room in our society for leaders—people who have power over other people—to treat people as less than human beings" (p.18), and he asked managers to "treat the people you count on the most—your employees—like gold, or, more importantly, like human beings" (p.20). He exhorted

managers to be honest and straightforward, to be fair to employees, and to be aware of the way that they (the mangers) speak to employees, as all of these factors signal how the manager values employees (pp.20-24).

According to Bruce (2003), "Humanness and humanity are the cornerstones of self-esteem and high morale," (p. 8), so treating employees as humans, not just as workers, is a necessity in building a high morale workplace. She said that if you "love your people. . . they'll love where they work" (p.53). Because employees are real people with families, interests, and responsibilities outside of work, Bruce also mentioned that employers can help employees balance their personal and business lives by making the work environment a more satisfying, enriching, and enjoyable place to be (p.60).

Fromm (1991) believed that managers need to show their employees that they (the employees) are actually more important than the customers, and managers need to let employees know that they will not tolerate customers who treat their employees poorly (p.14). Fromm also suggested treating everyone within the workplace as family and celebrating important occasions with them (p.55). He, along with Hacker (1997), proposed that acknowledging birthdays and other special events in employees' lives makes individuals feel special and shows that the employer cares (Fromm, 1991, pp.65-66; Hacker, 1997, p.152). Other small efforts can serve to make employees feel special as well. A gesture as simple as providing business cards for every employee within an organization shows each individual that he has significant value within the workplace, and it serves as a source of pride for employees (p.34). Fromm also stated that acknowledging work anniversaries every year, beginning with the first year, is an important way to let employees know that their years of service and dedication to the organization are important and worth celebrating (p.62). He

believed that when providing employee education, in addition to offering work-related

training designed for professional growth, employees should be encouraged toward personal

growth through courses, training, and experiences in any area of interest to them (p.155-156).

He reiterated the importance of treating employees well when he said that, "If you want the

customer to be treated like a king, treat the people you manage like royalty" (p. 171).

Individuals also need to feel loved and supported and to have a sense of belonging

within their workplace (Bruce, 2003, p.6; Haasen & Shea, 2003, p.109). Employees who

experience a closeness or "family spirit" (Haasen & Shea, 2003, p.109) with other employees

and who feel that they are a part of a team may experience satisfaction and enjoyment.   In an

ideal work culture, employees should have the opportunity to share experiences with

coworkers and to form close bonds with each other (Haasen & Shea, 2003, p.165). Paul and

Reck (2006) believed that showing genuine caring to others is a key to help others to feel

better about themselves and to encourage enthusiasm and positive energy in the workplace.

Employees are more likely to have self-confidence and positive feelings toward work when

they believe that their employer truly cares about them (p.29). Bruce (2003) expressed how

managers who show that they care about employees instill greater self-confidence in

employees (p.119), and this confidence builds morale (p.129). Treating people well is not

incompatible with success in business. Paul and Reck (2006) described a study of 16,000

corporate managers that found that the highest achievers were the managers who believed

that people, not just profits, were valuable (p.5). Paul and Reck (2006) encouraged

individuals not to underestimate the significance of caring when they said,

> While most people quickly admit that caring about others is a good thing to
>
> do, they fail to appreciate two very important aspects of caring: how huge the

return is that comes back to you from caring and how quickly your personal

and professional lives can change for the better once you start. (p.vii)

Part of treating employees as people first is showing respect and treating them with

dignity. Bruce (2003) suggested that asking employees to rate how much or how little

employees are valued and treated with respect and dignity is an important way to assess an

organization's morale (p.68). One way of showing respect to employees is to trust them.

Many workplaces have lengthy handbooks filled with rules telling employees what they can

do and what they must not do. While job expectations must be clear, extensive rules, often

unrelated to the actual work, come across as rigid and inflexible.   Fromm (1991) asserted

that rules can make staff members feel bitter and unhappy.   Rules suggest that the employer

does not trust employees and leads employees to feel that they are being treated like children.

He believed that an organization should not create rules to address the small number of

employees who may be doing something inappropriate or wrong when the majority of

employees are doing things well without rules. He suggested allowing the organization's

culture to replace rules, and then speaking directly to those whose behavior or performance is

problematic instead of creating rules and policies that affect everyone (pp.121-122).

Meeting employees' basic human needs is another way of treating workers as people

first. Sirota et al. (2005) described how important it is for an individual to feel that his

organization takes a genuine interest in his well-being.   The authors explained that, in order

for employees to be satisfied in their jobs, they must feel that they work in a safe and

comfortable environment and that the workload is reasonable. Employees need to believe

that the compensation, both salary and benefits, they receive is equitable and adequate and

that they have reasonable job security. Employees also have the need to receive respect, to

know that they will receive a fair hearing for complaints, and to know that the employer will make reasonable accommodations for their personal and family needs (pp.10-11). Sirota et al. described the need of employees to have warm, cooperative relationships within the workplace. They explained that these relationships are important for encouraging teamwork and are also essential for mental health (p.17). Meeting these physiological, economic, and psychological needs can help to build employee satisfaction and enthusiasm.

      Involving employees in decision-making. Allowing and encouraging employee participation in decisions affecting their work is one key to increasing job satisfaction and employee productivity (O'Toole & Lawler, 2006, pp.46-47), which benefits both employees and the organization (p.48). In fact,

> when managers give workers authority over their work and then reward them for
> doing the right thing, they address basic human needs for recognition, control, and
> belonging, needs that are more important determinants of employee morale and
> performance than are the physical conditions of work. (pp.46-47).

  Sirota et al. (2005) explained that a participative environment is an important part of employee feelings of achievement, which contribute significantly to employee morale (p.17). Fromm (1991) emphasized the importance of moving decision-making down in an organization in order to empower people. Rather than managers making most decisions, front-line employees who are affected most by decisions should be giving input and having a significant say in decisions that need to be made (pp.52-53). Paul and Reck (2006) highlighted the importance of being sure that *everyone* within an organization has the opportunity to be heard and to make suggestions for improvement (p.55).   Involving everyone in an organization, from top to bottom and across all sectors, is important because

excluding any employees is likely to result in apathy and resistance to change (Pritchett & Pound, 1993, p.26). The organization benefits from soliciting employee participation as well because "the people who are out there with their feet on the street are likely to have the best ideas as to what needs to be done" (PBP Executive Reports, 2007, p.11).

One of the most common employee complaints about the workplace is a manager who micromanages (Kroth, 2007, p.23). While mangers need to provide adequate guidance and support, micromanaging reduces employee creativity, diminishes initiative, leads employees to feel undervalued, and eventually causes employees to become dependent. Micromanaging is "not only demotivating but humiliating" (p.23). Pascarella (1984) explained that negative employee attitudes, poor job performance, and poor customer service can arise when systems in an organization do not allow employees to make decisions and use their own discretion in doing their job, but instead require employees to rely on supervisors and managers for approval or supervision of day-to-day tasks (p.45). Haasen and Shea (2003) agreed that a culture that embraces less control and fewer restrictive regulations promotes employee participation and contributions, greater employee involvement, and more initiative (p.205). Motivation increases when employees have full responsibility and control in their jobs (p.108). These authors believed that ideally, employees should have the freedom and personal autonomy "to make all job-related decisions" (p.165). They explained that "when people are treated as responsible adults at work, they will respond as such and take ownership of their jobs" (p.205).

Part of involving all employees in decision-making is allowing and encouraging employees to share their opinions and ideas. Bruce (2003) suggested that finding out if employees believe that all opinions at work are valued is an important part of a morale audit,

indicating that the value placed on employee opinions can affect employee morale (p.68) . Hacker (1997) believed that employers should frequently ask employees for their opinions and include them in decision-making, and she even suggested that employees should receive rewards for giving input and sharing ideas (pp.93-95). Listening to and valuing employees ideas and opinions is essential because, "Nothing demoralizes today's employees faster—and therefore results in an immediate and measurable decrease in productivity—then [*sic*] the feeling that he or she is not being listened to" (PBP Executive Reports, 2007, p.12).

 Enderlin-Lampe (2002) discussed positive outcomes that may results from including teachers in decision-making, such as empowering teachers and increasing teachers' sense of efficacy, which in turn may lead to better job performance and increased persistence (p.141-143). Including employees at all levels of an organization can lead to greater productivity, greater satisfaction, and higher morale.

In studying teacher perceptions, Blase and Kirby (1992) found that inclusion of teachers in decision-making was "a way to diffuse problems that could demoralize faculty by making each teacher feel part of the school family" (p.41). Involving teachers in decision-making can improve morale (p.42) and can lead to teachers feeling greater self-esteem, excitement, satisfaction, and comfort (p.43). In Blase and Kirby's study, including teachers in decision-making affected teacher behavior by improving faculty unity, raising morale, increasing support for decisions, and ultimately making better decisions (p.45).

Imber and Neidt (1990) described a study of teacher satisfaction specifically related to participation in decision making (p.73). They described a number of factors that may influence a teacher's satisfaction in the decision-making process. These factors included the way that the decision personally and professionally affects the individual teacher, the benefit

to self or school from the decision-making process, rewards received for participating, and the degree to which the decision was actually implemented (p.76). Therefore, not only must the opportunity for participation in decision-making be available, but teachers must also perceive the benefits as worth the cost of participation and must believe that their participation in the process resulted in an actual improvement and was not a waste of time (p.76).

Some principals or managers may be reluctant to include employees in decision-making or to give employees the authority to make decisions themselves for fear that it will diminish their own power and authority (McEwan, 2003, p.64). McEwan, however, reassured leaders that "when you share power, responsibility and accountability, your return will exceed 100 percent and continue for as long as you keep sharing" (p.64). Deeprose (2007) echoed McEwan's belief about managers' power when she said, "Doesn't empowering employees diminish their own power? Not at all. Power is not a zero sum game. Empowered employees working creatively produce a more powerful work unit, thus increasing the power of the manager" (p.93). Deeprose suggested that employees should have the authority to set their own goals, make decisions, and work to solve problems (p.93). Confirming the benefits of including employees in decision-making, Langley and Jacobs (2006) stated that "Empowering and allowing your staff to make decisions will not only help get the job done correctly but also instill a sense of worth and accomplishment among your staff members" (p.31).

Recognizing and rewarding employee accomplishments. Most individuals entering a job beginning a new position want to do the job well and want to have the opportunity to experience success in the job (Sirota et al., 2005, pp.201-203; PBP Executive

Reports, 2007. p.7). Sirota et al. indicated that "people have a strong need to do something

that matters and to do it well" (p.167).   Most employees want to feel successful, want to use

their skills to make a difference (p. 201-203), and want to be proud of the work they do

(p.195).   When employees perform well at their jobs, then "to receive recognition for one's

achievements is among the most fundamental of human needs" (p.223). Sirota et al.

described how an employee "wants to believe that she *counts*…When workers have that

feeling, it pays off in incalculable ways for the organization" (p.119). Recognizing the

successes that an employee experiences and rewarding employees for their achievement are

important ways to help employees feel more satisfied in their work (Bruce, 2003, p.6;

Deeprose, 2007, p.9; Emmerich, 2009, p.78; PBP Executive Reports, 2007, p. 12).

According to Herzberg (1966), achievement and recognition are among the strongest

determiners of satisfaction at work (p.72). Litwin and Stringer (1968) acknowledged that the

need for experiencing achievement is one of the factors that drives work-related behavior

(p.8). Using data from over four million employees in a period of 30 years, Sirota et al. cited

achievement as one of three primary factors influencing workplace motivation (pp.14-15). In

discussing the emotional needs of employees, Bruce (2003) listed recognition and

achievement as needs that, when met, can help contribute to greater morale in the workplace

(p.6).

Providing opportunities for achievement and acknowledging successes help to create

positive attitudes and build morale and motivation. Paul and Reck (2006) explained that

acknowledging and celebrating achievement and success "recharges batteries" (p. 100) and

helps to build excitement and energy in the workplace. Emmerich (2009) discussed the need

for employees to feel appreciated and to receive encouragement on a daily basis (p.78). In

addition, she explained that besides the day-to-day appreciation and recognition, holding

special ceremonies to recognize and reward accomplishments of employees is beneficial.

She believed that it is important to focus continuously on success (p.79). Failing to

recognize outstanding employee performance is an action that decreases morale and

motivation, as employees feel that no one has noticed their achievement or that their

accomplishment does not matter. In fact, when managers fail to recognize outstanding

performance,

> it creates a negative environment, with negative consequences for morale and
>
> productivity. This applies not only to the individual employee whose outstanding
>
> contribution isn't acknowledged enough, but to all those around the employee as well,
>
> who see that the extraordinary effort is merely taken for granted. It kills their morale
>
> as well, and makes them think: "Why bother?" (PBP Executive Reports, 2007,p.2)

Recognition and rewards can come in many forms, from a verbal expression of thanks

to elaborate gifts and awards. Praise is one form of recognition that, in a school setting, can

contribute to improving teacher instructional performance, improve school climate, and build

unity of staff (Blase & Kirby, 1992, pp. 12). Blase and Kirby conducted a study that

investigated teacher perceptions of strategies that principals use. Praise was "perceived as

one of the most effective by teachers in our study" (p.10). These authors acknowledged that

in their investigation, praise led to an increase in motivation (p.13), and teachers who

received praise recognized how it made them feel and attempted to use more praise with their

students (p.14). The use of sincere praise specifically tied to teacher strengths helped build

teacher satisfaction and confidence (pp.12, 19). One teacher who participated in the study

explained the link between receiving praise and her job performance in saying, "…when I

feel that what I do is noticed and appreciated, I have a better feeling about my job and try to do a better job" (p.13).   The authors summarized the benefits of praise by saying, "It appears then that praise is an effective strategy for improving school climate because it enhances teacher morale and teachers' attitudes toward students. It also enhances teachers' instructional practices and the amount of effort they put forth" (p.14). Managers who are effective praise employee behavior that they wish to see repeated (PBP Executive Reports, 2007, p.14). Hacker (1997) cited a survey of 5,000 employees who indicated reasons for leaving jobs, and among the six reasons generated, one was the failure of managers to praise good work (p.xvii). She recognized that, "although no manager can offer employees everything they want, appreciation and understanding go a long way" (p.xv). A 2009 survey of 1,047 individuals around the world confirmed that employees rank praise and attention from leaders as even more effective motivators in the workplace than financial incentives (Dewhurst, Guthridge, & Mohr, 2010, para. 2).

Deeprose (2007) stated that "the happiest and most productive employees are those who enjoy doing their work and who are recognized for their accomplishments" (p.9) She discussed recognizing employees as a way to encourage high performance. Employee recognition helps to build self-esteem, which leads to higher performance (p.81). She stated that recognizing employees helps to retain excellent workers and to recruit new high performers and to inspire employees to perform at a high level (p.1). She indicated that "recognizing and rewarding employees does more than make people happy. Solid numbers show that it contributes directly to bottom-line results" (p.3). According to Deeprose, rewards may meet employee needs (p.22), should reflect the values of the organization (p.51), and should make employees feel proud to receive them (p.35). Rewards can be for

individuals or teams within an organization (p.95), and the reason for the reward or

recognition must be clear in order to maximize its effectiveness (p.29). Deeprose suggested

many ways of recognizing and rewarding employees that have little or no cost (p.113). Some

of her suggestions included developing a wall of fame or recognition board (p.109), allowing

employees to choose a project (p.112), writing letters to employees and to their immediate

supervisors (p.113), verbally praising employees at meetings (p.113), arranging for the

president of the organization to offer a personal thanks to employees (p.113), and posting

recognition information on the organization's website or in a newsletter (p.116). Deeprose

also suggested that creating a work environment that employees enjoy can itself be a reward

(p.101) and that doing this can involve encouraging innovation and giving employees more

control over their jobs, providing pleasant working conditions, providing workplace

amenities, instituting health initiatives, and regularly adding fun to the workplace (pp.102-

103). Deeprose emphasized the importance of involving employees in developing a

workplace reward program (p.33).

Highlighting the importance of workplace reward programs, Pritchett and Pound

(1993) asserted that employees will be more likely to make necessary changes if "you make

it worth their while" (p.12). Managers should recognize and reward the employee behaviors

that they want to encourage and should remember that many rewards have no monetary cost

but can include celebrations, honor, time, and attention. The authors explained that it is

important for rewards and recognition to relate to specific desirable employee behaviors, and

they cautioned managers to not "contaminate the reward system by giving to everybody

whether they're deserving or not" (p.12).

Paul and Reck (2006) believed that "sincere appreciation gets results" (p.41). People

like to feel appreciated, and employers who show appreciation for high performance

encourage employees to continue to perform at high levels. The authors believed that it is

important to extravagantly recognize and reward employees who have gone beyond their job

requirements and who have done something extraordinary. While a simple "thank you" may

be nice, an unexpected, extravagant show of appreciation will motivate employees to want to

continue to perform enthusiastically and beyond their job requirements (pp.45-47).

Not only is spontaneous, informal praise beneficial for employee morale in the school

setting, but also scheduling time for teacher recognition is important (Blase & Kirby, 1992,

p.19). The use of rewards and recognition can improve morale and can reduce absenteeism,

and Blase and Kirby indicated that teachers in their study claimed that rewards and

recognition encouraged them to put forth extra effort both in and out of the classroom (pp.71-

72). Rewards can be small tangible items, food, or earned privileges, such as a coupon to

arrive late or leave early or for a half day off (p.72). Hacker (1997) also endorsed the use of

small rewards or the "gift of time" (p.165).

Making work fun. Most individuals would love to have a job that they enjoyed and

that they believed was fun. Many employees are unhappy at work, and many workplaces

"have become prisons for the human spirit and anchors for depression" (Berg, 1995, para. 2).

Employers who work to create an environment that fosters fun and enjoyment help to build

morale and greater workplace satisfaction (Fromm, 1991, p.141-142). Bruce (2003) believed

that the inclusion of fun and creativity in the workplace is an indicator of workplace morale

(p.44). Bruce and Pepitone (1999) stated that employees who are having fun are the "single

most important trait of highly effective and successful organizations" (p.89) and that there

are correlations between having fun at work and productivity, creativity, morale, employee

satisfaction and retention, employee absenteeism, and customer satisfaction (p.89).

Employees who have fun at work have higher self-esteem, greater energy and enthusiasm,

more team spirit, motivation, and positive attitudes (p.89).   Including humor and fun in the

workplace has many benefits, according to Bruce and Pepitone, such as creating energy,

breaking up boredom and fatigue, alleviating stress, improving communication, uniting

people, easing conflict, and providing natural healing properties (p.91). Underscoring the

importance of humor in the workplace, Hurren (2006) conducted a survey in which data from

471 Nevada teachers suggested a positive relationship between use of humor by principals

and the job satisfaction of teachers (pp. 379-382). Hacker (1997) concurred that humor and

fun help to decrease stress and alleviate conflicts, help to prevent boredom and fatigue, and

promote creativity (pp.100-101). McManus (2000), an author and a leader in team quality

and effectiveness, suggested that fun is essential in promoting high performance in the

workplace, and he stated that "work can't seem like prison; it must be something that people

look forward to" (p. 18).

Work should be enjoyable for all employees (Fromm, 1991, p.141). Fromm (1991)

believed that making work fun for all is the best way to improve productivity and that "the

bottom line is that if you want to increase productivity, you should make it your top priority

to ensure that people enjoy their work" (p.159). Fromm believed that every aspect of work

should be enjoyable, including meetings, which should always begin on a positive note and

should always include a surprise (p.141-142). Fun can come in many forms, including

parties, family events, and outings (p.160-162). Based on his experience, Fromm indicated

that "If the people in your organization are having fun, I'll guarantee you that the business is

doing well" (p.159). One of Fromm's employees, after participating in a fun event during the workday, commented, "When we go back to work, we're all refreshed and feel a whole lot better about the place at which we've chosen to spend a big part of our lives" (p.162).

Factors that exist in the workplace may decrease workplace fun, and in doing so can negatively affect employee satisfaction and performance. A dysfunctional work environment, negative culture, distrust among individuals within a workplace, intolerance of creativity and employee input, and ineffective management practices can all decrease workplace fun (Pryor, Singleton, Taneja, & Humphreys, 2010, pp. 295-296). A reciprocal relationship between fun and its workplace correlates seems to exist. When workplace fun is present, benefits exist in the areas of employee performance, productivity, and retention. Meeting performance and productivity goals may cause individuals to experience fun and pleasure in the workplace as well (p. 301).

Encouraging employees to choose their attitudes carefully. Individuals are ultimately responsible for the attitudes that they bring to the workplace. When employees in a workplace consciously choose to have positive attitudes, the workplace becomes an enjoyable place to be, both for employees and for those the employees are serving. Lundin et al. (2000) expressed this philosophy in this way: "There is always a choice about the way you do your work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself" (p.36).   Emmerich (2009) encouraged individuals to carefully choose their attitudes each day and to understand that each individual is in charge of her own attitude (p.93). She quoted William James, who expressed this sentiment when he said, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life simply by altering his attitudes" (p. 91), and Charles Swindoll, who said, "I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I

react to it" (pp.93-94). Individuals can choose to enjoy what they do (p.104), to excel by

going beyond their job description (p.117), and to find solutions instead of making excuses

(p.86).

Employees can make the choice to have a positive attitude, even when they do not

feel like it (Hacker, 1997, pp.38-39). Hacker (1997) believed that individuals should choose

to start each day with positive thoughts and should understand that the individual alone is

responsible for her happiness (p.36-39). She stressed that employees should "trade

complaints for solutions" (p.190). Negative attitudes tend to spread quickly among

employees (p.40), and Hacker warned that the resulting negative behaviors can have

devastating consequences on job performance by interrupting work, causing stress, and

decreasing morale (p.188). She emphasized the importance of employee attitudes by stating

that "a good attitude = high morale" (p.31). Affirming this belief in the importance of

attitude, Paul and Reck (2006) said, "Have you ever heard the phrase, 'Attitude is

everything'? Take it to heart, for there's no such thing as an effective leader with a bad

attitude. The best way to engage people is with your attitude, enthusiasm, and excitement"

(p.28). Choosing a positive attitude, then, has positive consequences for both individuals and

organizations.

Pritchett (1994) also believed that individuals are responsible for their own actions

and attitudes. He warned that "if you put someone else in charge of your morale, you

disempower yourself" (p.38). He exhorted employees to create a better workplace by taking

"charge of your moods. *Act* upbeat, and you will start to *feel* better. Show resilience—

bounce back on your own—rather than allowing yourself to wallow in negative emotions,

such as anger, depression, or grief" (p.39). He acknowledged that the way an organization

operates and the way its employees are treated do matter, but "if we *expect* ourselves to stand personally responsible for our attitudes—we'll all be much better off" (p.38).

Summary

Existing research suggests that employee morale affects both individuals and organizations, with positive characteristics and outcomes associated with high workplace morale and negative characteristics and outcomes associated with low workplace morale. Measuring workplace morale regularly through formal or informal measures can help managers to address morale concerns.   Research suggests that treating employees well, including employees in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding employees, making the workplace fun, and encouraging all employees to carefully choose their attitudes are ways to improve workplace morale.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

This purpose of this study was to investigate staff morale at Sparkling Springs

Elementary School in the Northwoods School District. This study assessed staff morale,

used staff input to develop and implement measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs

staff morale, and reassessed Sparkling Springs staff morale following intervention to

determine if those efforts to improve morale had any effect. This investigation also

examined student outcome measures to explore the potential impact *for students* of

attempting to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale. Staff morale has the potential to affect

staff performance, which in turn can affect student achievement, so staff morale is an issue

that is relevant to the current emphasis on results in education.

Action Research

Action research is a type of applied research that allows a researcher within a given

setting to identify a problem in her own work setting and to work with others in that setting

to find ways to solve that problem. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) described action research as

a means of "obtaining information in order to inform local practice" (p.589). Action research

is "rooted in the interests and needs of practitioners" (p.589) and those who conduct this type

of research "want to solve some kind of day-to-day immediate problem" (p.589). Fraenkel

and Wallen (2009) emphasized that the needs and interests of those working in a given

setting drive the research which is meaningful specifically to those who work in that setting

(p.588).   Participatory action research not only seeks to address a specific issue in a given

setting, but it also serves to "empower individuals and groups to improve their lives and to

bring about social change at some level" (p.590).   In participatory research, "every effort is

made to involve all those who have a vested interest in the outcomes of the study" (p.612).

The steps in action research include identifying the problems or questions to be addressed,

gathering data, analyzing and interpreting data, sharing data with participants, and

developing an action plan (p.612).

McEwan and McEwan (2003) described user-driven research, their version of action

research, as research that educators conduct in their own schools or classrooms; that

educators develop based on the needs of the school or community; and whose purpose is to

improve a classroom, school, or district (pp.130-131). With its focus on a local problem and

attempts to involve educators and other school personnel in addressing the problem, this

study involved action research.   This investigation focused on a specific issue—staff morale

and its potential influence students—in one specific school, Sparkling Springs Elementary

School. The study was based on the needs of Sparkling Springs Elementary School with the

goal of improving this school. This investigation invited all full-time staff members to

participate, since these are the individuals who are most affected by the research outcomes.

Action research may contain elements of both qualitative and quantitative research

(Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.593). The examination of the current state of staff morale at

Sparkling Springs Elementary School, the factors that influence staff morale, staff member

beliefs about improving morale, parent perceptions of staff morale, and changes in morale

during the course of the study comprised the qualitative element of this study. The

quantitative components of this research included the following: investigating whether or not

differences existed between staff morale for employees with different job types (certified

classroom teachers, other certified teachers, classified staff members) and between staff

morale for employees with different numbers of years of employment in the field of

education; determining whether or not differences existed in the overall level of morale and in individual staff member's morale before and after the implementation of morale-boosting efforts; comparing student outcome measures, using reading levels and behavior referral data, before, during, and after implementation of efforts to improve morale; and determining whether or not a difference in staff absences pre and post intervention existed.

A research study that follows an individual or a group of people over time may be a single case design (Bowers, Huisingh, & LoGiudice, 2010, p.81). Such a study examines the results of an intervention.   A defining feature of single-case design is that the researcher evaluates an individual or group before intervention—which provides the baseline—and after intervention, so the individual or group serves as its own control. In a single case design, the researcher cannot conclusively determine that the outcomes were a result of the intervention alone, as there may be other factors that affect the results for which this research design does not control. The purpose of single-case design is an in-depth examination of a specific issue in an individual or group. (p.81). This research on staff morale represented a single-case design in that it followed a specific group of people—the staff and students of Sparkling Springs Elementary School —over time. The first staff survey provided a baseline for comparison to the second staff survey in the area of staff morale, and the first set of data on student reading levels and behavior referrals provided a baseline for comparison to the second set of data in the area of student achievement. The study was not designed to conclusively identify a cause for changes in morale or in student achievement, but rather the purpose was to carefully investigate staff morale, including what may influence staff morale and the impact that changes in staff morale may have on students.

Subjects

In action research, subjects are individuals from the specific setting of interest. "Action research problems almost always focus on only a particular group of individuals" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.594). In this investigation, the full-time staff members of Sparkling Springs Elementary School comprised the group of interest.   The investigator invited all full-time staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School to participate in this investigation.   For the purpose of this research, full-time staff members included all paid employees whose primary work location was Sparkling Springs Elementary School and who worked hours that were considered full-time for their given position. Special education staff members who were employed by another agency but whose primary work location was Sparkling Springs Elementary School were included. All substitutes—both short-term and long-term—in any type of position were excluded.   Band and orchestra teachers, teachers of English Language Learners, physical therapists, and occupational therapists were excluded since they traveled among several schools and spent a limited amount of time at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.   All full-time staff members were included in the invitations to participate in focus groups, regardless of participation in or inclusion of data from the surveys.

The subjects invited to participate included the following: 19 classroom teachers (kindergarten through fifth grade), five special area teachers (one art teacher, one music teacher, one librarian, and two physical education teachers), four special education staff members (one self-contained classroom teacher, one resource teacher, one teacher assistant, and one speech-language pathologist), two teacher clerks, two building aids, two reading

specialists, three custodians, four cafeteria workers, one instructional specialist, one

secretary, one counselor, one nurse, and one principal.

McEwan and McEwan (2003) stated the need for the researcher to disclose her role

in the research setting and her connections to research subjects (p.84).   At the time of this

study, the investigator was a classroom teacher at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, and

as such, had personal connections with many of the other Sparkling Springs Elementary

School staff members. As a classroom teacher in this setting, the researcher also was a

participant in the investigation. Participation of the investigator in the research is one of the

defining characteristics of action research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, pp. 589-592).

The investigator invited subjects to participate in the survey portion of this

investigation verbally, with a flier posted in the staff lounge, and by e-mail. The investigator

provided paper copies of the survey to interested individuals. Following the completion and

collection of surveys, the researcher verbally invited subjects to participate in the focus

groups, posted a flier and sign-up sheet in the staff lounge, and e-mailed an invitation to

participate to all staff members.   The investigator asked interested individuals to contact the

investigator by e-mail, by phone, in person, or by signing up on the sheet posted in the staff

lounge. The researcher posted a list of meeting dates, times, and topics in the staff lounge,

and she invited individuals to attend any or all of the meetings.   The investigator sent an e-

mail reminder to all full-time staff members approximately one week before each focus

group meeting. The investigator attended a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting at

Sparkling Springs Elementary School and issued a verbal invitation to parents present to

participate in the investigation by completing a survey.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, and what factors do Sparkling Springs staff members believe contribute to their morale?

2. How do staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School believe that the morale of Sparkling Springs staff members can be improved?

3. How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect Sparkling Springs staff morale and staff member absences during the course of a school year?

4. How do efforts to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale affect the reading achievement and behavior of Sparkling Springs students?

5. How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect parent perception of Sparkling Springs staff morale?

Hypotheses

Alternate Hypothesis #1. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of classroom teachers, certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

Alternate Hypothesis #2. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of Sparkling Springs staff members with one to five years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with six to 10 years of experience in education, Sparkling

Springs staff members with 11-15 years of experience in education, and Sparkling Springs staff members with 16 or more years of experience in education.

Alternate Hypothesis #3. An increase in Sparkling Springs staff member morale, as measured by the survey, will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff member morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #4. A decrease in the number of Sparkling Springs staff member absences within a school year will exist following the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #5. An increase in the percent of Sparkling Springs students in first through fifth grade reading at or above grade level will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #6. A decrease in the number of behavior referrals for Sparkling Springs students in kindergarten through fifth grade will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Data Collection

The investigator used surveys to collect data from Sparkling Springs staff members and from parents of Sparkling Springs parents (see Appendix A for the staff morale survey and Appendices B and C for parent surveys). The researcher used focus groups for additional data collection from staff members. In addition, the researcher examined student reading data and behavior referral information to gain information on student outcomes during the period of the study.

Staff survey. The investigator provided paper copies of the staff survey to each interested participant, along with an envelope in which to place the completed survey. Prior

to survey distribution, the investigator assigned each survey a random number from a random

number table.   The investigator hand-delivered the surveys to the individuals who indicated

an interest in participating, and she created a list with the number from each survey, along

with the name of the individual receiving that survey. The investigator maintained a list of

participants' names and unique identification numbers in order to match pre-and post survey

data. The researcher was the only person to see this list and maintained this list in a locked

file.

Use of paper surveys allowed participants to complete the survey in any location and

at any time of day. The researcher chose to use paper surveys rather than electronic surveys

because not all staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School had access to a

computer at work, and the investigator did not know if those staff members who did not have

access to a computer at work had access to a computer at home or in another setting. The

investigator asked participants to place completed surveys in envelopes provided to them, to

seal the envelope, and to place the sealed envelope in a labeled box in the staff lounge before

school, after school, or any time during the school day. At the end of each day, the

researcher removed surveys collected that day.   The researcher placed the surveys received

that day in a locked file. Survey collection continued in this manner for two weeks to allow

participants adequate time to complete surveys. One week before the final collection date,

the investigator sent an e-mail to remind staff members of the invitation to participate and of

the due date.

During the final quarter of the school year, the investigator distributed a second copy

of the staff survey to individuals who had completed the first survey.   Using the list of

participant names and numbers, the investigator wrote the survey identification number on

each survey. She then hand-delivered surveys and envelopes to participants to ensure that

each individual received the survey with the correct identification number, to enable

comparison of survey data. Survey collection took place in the manner described above.

Staff focus groups. Following collection of the first survey, the investigator invited

staff members verbally, with a flier posted in the staff lounge, and by e-mail to participate in

focus groups related to specific topics.   Topics of the focus groups included the following

themes from the literature on employee morale: the current state of morale at Sparkling

Springs Elementary School, treating staff members well, including staff members in

decision-making, recognizing and rewarding the achievement of staff members, adding fun

to the workplace, and revisiting the current state of morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary

School following intervention. See Appendix D for focus group questions.

Focus groups took place in the investigator's classroom on school days after school

hours.   The investigator scheduled focus groups for days and times that did not conflict with

school and district meetings and activities. The investigator audio- recorded all focus groups,

and she informed participants of this before the beginning of each meeting. Focus group

participants signed an informed consent document (see Appendix E) before participation in

each focus group.

The primary purpose of the focus groups was to involve interested staff members in

generating ideas for improving staff morale. Following each focus group meeting, the

researcher developed a summary list of ideas from the meeting and met with the principal of

Sparkling Springs Elementary School to present the ideas for consideration. For each idea

approved for implementation, the investigator made the necessary contacts to begin

implementation of the suggestion.

Parent survey.   The investigator hand-delivered paper copies of the parent survey to all interested participants at a Parent-Teacher Association meeting. Prior to survey distribution, the investigator assigned each survey a random number from a random number table.   The investigator maintained a list of participants' names and unique identification numbers in order to match pre and post survey data. The researcher was the only person to see this list and maintained this list in a locked file. The investigator asked participants to place completed surveys in envelopes provided to them, to seal the envelope, and to return the survey in the labeled envelope to the school office or to their child's teacher. Office staff members and classroom teachers sent the envelopes to the investigator's classroom.   Survey collection continued for two weeks to allow participants adequate time to complete surveys.

During the final quarter of the school year, the investigator distributed a second copy of the parent survey to individuals who had completed the first survey.   After writing the identification number on each survey to enable comparison of survey data, the researcher delivered surveys and envelopes to the students whose parents completed the first survey. The students took the surveys home to their parents. The survey directions asked parents to return their completed surveys in the labeled envelope to the school office or to their child's teacher in order for the office staff and classroom teachers to send the envelopes to the investigator's classroom.

Student outcome data.   Sparkling Springs Elementary School collects yearly data on student reading levels. Classroom teachers for first through fifth grade assess student reading levels using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) at the beginning and end of each school year. Using standard benchmarks for reading levels at each grade level, results from the DRA allow teachers at Sparkling Springs Elementary School to determine if each student

is reading at grade level, below grade level, or above grade level. Students proficient in

reading are those reading at or above grade level. Reading specialists at Sparkling Springs

Elementary School maintain DRA results from students in each teacher's classroom. The

investigator obtained DRA results for students in first through fifth grades from the end of

the 2009-2010 school year from the reading specialists to use as the baseline student

achievement measure for reading levels. The investigator compiled the data to determine the

percent of proficient students for each grade level. The investigator obtained data for

students in grades one through five from the end of the 2010-2011 school year from the

reading specialists to use as the comparison to the reading data from the previous school

year. The investigator compiled this second set of data to determine the percent of proficient

students for each grade level.

All Sparkling Springs Elementary School students in grades one through five

participate in reading unit assessments. These standardized assessments are part of

Macmillan/McGraw Hill's Treasures reading program, and all teachers within a grade level

give students the same test. The investigator obtained reading unit assessment data from the

reading teachers during the period of this investigation to use as a repeated measures analysis

of variance during the study.

Sparkling Springs Elementary School collects yearly data on office referrals for

behavior. The school office maintains referral data for all students. The investigator

obtained referral data for the 2009-2010 school year from the office to use as the baseline

student achievement measure for student behavior. The investigator recorded referral data

for each grade level and for the school as a whole. The investigator obtained referral data

from the 2010-2011 school year from the office to use as the comparison to the baseline for

student behavior. The investigator recorded data from the second set for each grade level and the total number of referrals for the school.

Instrument Development

The investigator created the staff and parent surveys for this investigation. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) stated that, in action research, "often, the teachers, administrators, or counselors involved…develop their own instrument(s) in order to make them locally appropriate. And they are usually shorter, simpler, and less formal than the instruments used in more traditional research studies" (pp.593-594). The surveys that the investigator developed incorporated ideas from her review of the literature. She designed the surveys to be brief and easy to understand. A panel of individuals both in and outside the field of education reviewed the survey for content and clarity of survey items, and seven individuals piloted the staff survey by responding to the survey items and giving feedback about the survey. These reviewers responded to survey items and provided feedback about the survey items and design. Their feedback allowed the investigator to revise the survey in order to improve its design and clarity.

The survey contained a section for demographic information, including type of position and number of years in the field of education to allow disaggregation of results. The survey asked individuals to rate their level of agreement--choosing from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree--with statements related to job satisfaction, morale and associated factors. Following these statements, the survey contained two open-ended items, asking individuals to identify things they liked about their job and suggestions for change in their workplace. Participants completed the same survey both pre and post intervention in order to be able to make direct person-to-person comparisons of results.

Staff survey items.   Five survey items related to overall employee morale. These statements included the following: " I enjoy going to work each day," "My coworkers enjoy working here," "I am satisfied with my job and my workplace," "My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace," and "I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers." These statements asked employees about their feelings related to work and their perceptions of their coworkers feeling about work. Directly asking employees about their morale, employee attitudes, and enjoyment of work can provide valuable information as part of a morale audit (Bruce, 2003, p.68; Vail, 2005, p.19).

The items stating, "I feel valued as a person here" and "All employees here are treated with dignity and respect" related to employee perceptions of how organizations, supervisors, and coworkers treat staff members. In the survey she developed to assess employee morale, Bruce (2003) suggested asking employees to rate how much or how little they feel valued and respected, as these are important ways to assess morale in an organization (p.68).

Two statements in the survey reflected the concept of including employees in decision-making in the workplace: "My ideas and suggestions are valued at work" and "I have the opportunity to provide input about important decisions in my workplace." Job satisfaction may increase when employees have the opportunity to participate in decision-making (O'Toole & Lawler, 2006, pp.46-47).   Investigating how employees perceive the value that managers and organizations place on employee opinions and suggestions is a necessary component in an effective morale audit (Bruce, 2003, p.68).

Survey statements "Employees here receive praise and encouragement" and "I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work" related to receiving recognition for

accomplishments. Recognizing and rewarding employee achievements can help increase

employee satisfaction (Bruce, 2003, p.6; Deeprose, 2007, p.9; Emmerich, 2009, p.78; PBP

Executive Reports, 2007, p. 12), and in fact, recognition has a significant impact on both

attitudes and actions at work (Herzberg, 1966, p.72; Litwin & Stringer, 1968, p.72).

Investigating how employees perceive their opportunities to receive recognition and rewards

in the workplace may provide useful information about how satisfied employees are in their

work and how organizations and managers may be able to increase their satisfaction.

Two survey items related to fun in the workplace: "This is a fun place to work" and

"Creativity and fun are encouraged here." Employees who work in environments that

encourage fun have greater satisfaction and morale (Bruce, 2003, p.44; Fromm, 1991, p.141-

142). Fun in the workplace may be one of the most significant factors associated with high

employee morale, productive employees, and effective organizations (Bruce & Pepitone,

1999, p.89), so discovering employee perceptions related to fun in the workplace may be an

important piece of information in assessing morale and in working to improve morale.

Parent survey items. The items on the parent survey reflected similar themes to the

staff survey but from a parent perspective. The survey asked parents to indicate their level of

agreement—using strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree—with

statements related to their perceptions of staff member morale and actions. The second parent

survey asked parents to rate their level of agreement with the same statements as the first

survey, and it also asked parents to indicate if they noticed any changes in employee morale

during the school year. Each survey items provided space for parents to give examples or

explanations related to the item.

Items that stated "Teachers and other staff members at Sparkling Springs enjoy their jobs," "Teachers and other staff members at Sparkling Springs are satisfied with their jobs," and "Sparkling Springs teachers and other staff members have fun at work" reflected the idea that morale relates to enjoyment, satisfaction, and fun at work.   Bruce (2003) identified job satisfaction, enjoyment, and fun at work as indicators of employee morale (p.68), so finding out how parents perceive these elements can provide insight into staff morale.

Four items on the parent survey reflected employee actions that may be indicators of morale levels. Three statements related to parent perceptions of how staff members treat others. These statements included "Sparkling Springs teachers and other staff members treat parents well," "Sparkling Springs teachers and other staff members treat students well," and "Sparkling Springs teachers and other staff members treat each other well." One item, "I hear positive comments about Sparkling Springs from Sparkling Springs teachers and other staff members," addressed how staff members' words and actions reflect on the organization. Briggs and Richardson (1992) suggested that low morale may result in spitefulness, fighting, hostility, and inconsiderate behavior toward others in the workplace (p.91), while Emmerich (2009) explained how improving satisfaction in the workplace as ways of improving customer service (p.2). Sirota et al. (2005) described a positive correlation that exists between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (p.45) and explained that employees with high morale interact with customers in ways that reflect well on the organization (pp.41-43). Finding out how employees speak about the district and how they treat other employees and "customers"—with a school's customers being students and parents—is one way to assess workplace morale and its potential impact.

Focus group topics. For each of the six staff member focus groups, the investigator

developed a set of questions and topics for discussion. These questions served as a starting

point and were developed to help guide the discussion as needed, with the understanding that

the discussion might sustain itself without guidance from the researcher. The investigator

compiled a brief summary of current research applicable to each focus group topic to share

with focus group participants.

The first focus group addressed overall staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary

School. The final focus group revisited the topic of current staff morale at Sparkling Springs

Elementary School. Soliciting employee opinions about their morale is the best ways to find

out about morale in the workplace (Bruce, 2003, p.66; Hacker, 1997, p.102; Vail, 2005,

p.19), so providing staff members with the opportunity to share their input about the current

state of morale, reasons for morale levels, ways to improve morale, and observed changes in

morale was a valuable way to gain insight into the issue of staff morale at Sparkling Springs

Elementary School.

The topics of the four remaining focus groups were recurrent themes in the literature

on improving workplace morale. One focus group involved soliciting employee input on

how to treat Sparkling Springs employees well. Treating employees well is essential to

building morale in the workplace (Bruce, 2003, p.53).   Current literature suggests many

simple but important ways to treat employees well. Treating individuals with respect and

dignity by trusting them and treating them as responsible adults can help employees to feel

valued and satisfied at work (Fromm, 1991, p.121-122) and can lead to improvements in the

ways that employees treat others (Fromm, 1991, p.171). Acknowledging important events in

the lives of employees, such as birthdays, anniversaries, work anniversaries, and other special

occasions, can contribute to an employee's belief that his managers and organization truly

care about him as a human being (Fromm, 1991, p.55; Hacker, 1997, p. 152). The

investigator wanted to encourage Sparkling Springs employees to generate ideas related to

treating employees at Sparkling Springs well in order to help all staff members feel valued,

cared for, and respected.

Including staff members in decision-making was the topic of another focus group.

Encouraging employee participation in decision-making is one way to improve employee

satisfaction (O'Toole & Lawler, 2006, pp.46-47) and can contribute significantly to

employee morale (Sirota et al., 2005, p.17). Ensuring that everyone within an organization

has the opportunity to give input about significant decisions and organizational improvement

is essential (Paul & Reck, 2006, p.55), which is why the investigator invited all full-time staff

members at Sparkling Springs to contribute suggestions on ways to regularly solicit and

incorporate employee input in decision-making at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

The topic of the fourth focus group was recognizing and rewarding employees. At

the time of this investigation, Sparkling Springs Elementary School did not have a specific

plan for rewarding employee efforts and achievements. Receiving recognition for

achievements can help increase job satisfaction, and may even be "among the most

fundamental of human needs" (Sirota et al., 2005, p.223). Involving employees in the

development of a reward program is essential (Deeprose, 2007, p.33), and this focus group

attempted to involve employees of Sparkling Springs Elementary School in the development

of a plan to recognize and reward employees.

Adding fun to the workplace was the topic of the next focus group. Making work fun

can increase satisfaction and morale in the workplace and can improve creativity, employee

retention, absence rates, and customer satisfaction (Bruce & Pepitone, 1999, p.89; Fromm, 1991, p.141-142).   Fun can exist in many forms, so finding out how the employees of Sparkling Springs Elementary School believed that work could be more fun was the purpose of this focus group.

Student Outcome Instruments

The researcher in this study used student reading data from the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The DRA is a reading assessment developed by Pearson, based on current research and input from educators. During the development of the DRA, the company conducted tests of reliability, including internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability, interrater reliability, expert rater reliability, and passage equivalency (Research: Developmental Reading Assessment, 2011, para. 2) . The company stated that the DRA is "a valid measurement of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, as evidenced by the following validity measures: criterion-related validity, construct validity, content validity" (Research: Developmental Reading Assessment, 2011, para. 3).

The researcher also used student reading data from reading unit test scores. During the period of this study, Sparkling Springs Elementary School used Macmillan/McGraw Hill's *Treasures* reading program. The *Treasures* program included unit tests for each grade level. Unit tests included both selected response and constructed response items and assessed skills like phonics, phonemic awareness, listening and reading comprehension, vocabulary, and basic concepts. Teachers graded the unit tests using the scoring guide that the *Treasures* program provided. Teachers also collaborated with the reading specialists and with their grade-level teams for the scoring of constructed response items.   Macmillan/McGraw Hill incorporates research throughout the development of their products and utilizes field tests,

focus groups, teacher advisory boards, and expert review (Research: McGraw-Hill School Education Group, para. 2).

Description of Sample: Staff Survey

The investigator invited all 46 full-time staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School to participate in the staff survey and distributed the first staff survey to 39 individuals who indicated willingness to participate. Staff members returned 33 completed surveys, representing a return rate of 85%. Of the total surveys returned, classroom teachers completed 14 surveys, other certified staff members returned 11 surveys, and classified staff members returned eight surveys.

The investigator distributed the follow-up staff survey to the 33 staff members who returned the initial survey. Staff members returned 20 completed surveys, representing a return rate of 61%. Of the 20 surveys returned, classroom teachers completed nine surveys, other certified staff members returned five surveys, and classified staff members returned six surveys. Table 1 shows the number of respondents in each years-of-experience category for the first and second staff surveys.

Table 1

Number of Staff Member Survey Participants By Years of Experience

	First Survey	Second Survey
1-5 years	7	4
6-10 years	7	7
11-15 years	12	6
16 or more years	7	3

Description of Sample: Parent Survey

  The investigator distributed the first parent survey to 22 parents of Sparkling Springs Elementary School who indicated interest while attending a Parent-Teacher Association meeting, and seven returned completed surveys, representing a 32% return rate. Of the seven parents returning surveys, four parents had one student attending Sparkling Springs Elementary School, representing the following grade levels: kindergarten, third, and fourth. Three parents had more than one student attending Sparkling Springs Elementary School, representing the following grade levels: kindergarten, first, second, third, and fifth. The investigator distributed the follow-up parent survey to the seven parents who returned the first survey, and five of the seven, or 71%, returned completed surveys. Of the five parents who completed the second survey, three had one student attending Sparkling Springs Elementary School, representing third and fourth grades. Two parents responding to the second survey had more than one student attending the school, representing the following grades: kindergarten, first, second, third, and fifth.

Description of Sample: Focus Groups

The investigator invited all full-time staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary

School to participate in the focus group portion of this research. Table 2 represents

attendance at each focus group.

Table 2

Number of Staff Members Attending Focus Groups

	Classroom teachers	Certified non-classroom	Classified
Focus group 1	4	1	0
Focus group 2	3	1	0
Focus group 3	3	1	0
Focus group 4	2	1	0
Focus group 5	3	1	0
Focus group 6	3	0	0

A total of 12 individuals participated in focus groups. Of those 12, seven attended

one focus group, two attended two focus groups, one person participated in three focus

groups, one person attended four focus groups, and one individual participated in five focus

groups.

Description of Sample: Student Data

Reading Achievement Data. The reading specialists of Sparkling Springs

Elementary School provided reading data that the school routinely collects for students in

grades one through five. End-of-the-year Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores

for the 2009-2010 school year represented 328 students, while DRA scores for the 2010-2011

school year represented 348 students. From all available scores, the investigator used a

random sample of 30 students per grade for the 2009-2010 school year and for the 2010-2011

school year for statistical analysis.

Reading unit test scores for the three unit tests within the second semester of the

2010-2011 school year included 258 students. From all usable reading unit test scores, the

investigator used a random sample of 30 students (six per grade level) for statistical analysis.

Behavior Data. The Sparkling Springs Elementary School office staff provided

behavior data that the school routinely collects for students in kindergarten through fifth

grade. The data represented the total number of office referrals for each grade level for the

2009-2010 school year and the 2010-2011 school year. While enrollment fluctuated

throughout both school years, total student enrollment for each of these school years was

approximately 400 students.

Data Analysis

Staff survey. Because of the small number of potential participants in this study, the

investigator used all returned surveys as a convenience sample rather than employing random

sampling, which would have significantly reduced the number of responses available for

analysis. For both the first and the second staff surveys, participants responded to survey

items by indicating their level of agreement (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree,

strongly agree), using a likert-type scale. Assigning numerical values to likert scale

responses, and then adding those values to arrive at a total score is currently a common

practice in psychological measurement (Bond & Fox, 2001, p. 2). Likert scale responses,

however, represent ordinal data, (p.71), and the procedure of assigning and adding numerical

values treats ordinal data as interval data (p.2). This system is not a scientifically sound way to analyze data, and "the lack of empirical rigor in such a practice is indefensible" (p.2).   For these reasons, the investigator chose to tally the responses in each agreement level, to use those numbers to describe trends and observations, and to disaggregate data by job type (certified classroom teacher, certified non-classroom teacher, classified) and by years of experience in education (1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16+ years).   In order to determine whether or not a difference existed in morale levels based on type of job or years of experience in education, the investigator performed a chi-square test for independence, using agreement and strong agreement with five representative statements from the survey. The investigator performed a chi-square test for independence with disagreement and strong disagreement for the same five statements as well. In order to determine whether or not a difference existed between staff absences before and after implementation of staff-generated morale-boosting efforts, the investigator performed a *t*-test for difference in proportions. The investigator also performed a person-to-self comparison of results from the first and second survey using a *t*-test for difference in proportions.

The open-ended items on the staff survey asked participants to indicate things they liked about their jobs and suggestions for change. The investigator noted the number of respondents who made comments in each of these areas. The researcher also attempted to identify common themes in participant responses.

Parent survey.   For both the first and the second parent survey, participants responded to survey statements by indicating their level of agreement (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree) and by explaining their choice. For the second survey, participants responded to the same statements and also indicated whether they had

observed changes in morale levels of staff during the time of the study. The investigator

used survey data to describe trends and parent observations related to staff morale.

Focus groups.   The first and final focus groups related to current staff morale at

Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The investigator audio-recorded the focus groups,

prepared a transcript, removed identifying information from the transcript (such as the use of

names, room numbers, grade levels, and years of experience). The investigator compared

responses from the first and final focus groups to describe trends and changes.

The second through fifth focus groups each addressed one specific area related to

morale and satisfaction: treating staff members well, including staff in decision-making,

recognizing and rewarding achievements of employees, and adding fun to the workplace.

Because the primary purpose of the second through fifth focus groups was to include staff

members in generating ideas for improving morale, the investigator audio-recorded the focus

groups and then compiled a list of suggestions from the participants. When preparing the

list of suggestions, the investigator removed all identifying information related to

participants.   The researcher then used the list of suggestions when meeting with the

principal of Sparkling Springs Elementary School following each focus group to discuss the

implementation of suggestions.

Student achievement data. The investigator obtained Developmental Reading

Assessment (DRA) scores for Sparkling Springs Elementary School students in grades one

through five for the 2009-2010 school year and for the 2010-2011 school year from the

reading specialists of Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The investigator compiled

student scores by grade level and for the school as a whole. Using a random sample of 30

students per grade level, the investigator compared the percent of students reading

proficiently at each grade level for the 2009-2010 school year and the 2010-2011 school year using a *t*-test for the difference in means.

The investigator obtained reading unit test scores for Sparkling Springs Elementary School students in first through fifth grade during the period of the study. The investigator used a random sample of 30 students (six per grade level) to perform repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The investigator obtained behavior referral data for the 2009-2010 school year and for the 2010-2011 school year from the Sparkling Springs Elementary School office. The investigator compared data from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years for the school as a whole and by grade level as well using a *t*-test for the difference in proportions.

Timeframe

The investigator chose to conduct this investigation within one school year. This period has practical benefits, as staff members are less likely to be hired or to leave their job during the course of the school year than they are between school years. In addition, the investigator believed this timeframe to be adequate to bring about changes if the interventions were effective. As Emmerich (2009) said regarding change in the workplace, "The most exciting part is that positive, measurable changes that really matter can begin in a single day." Schmoker (1999) contended that effective change should bring about rapid results (p.56). Pritchett and Pound (1993) echoed this idea when they stated that "significant culture change should start to occur in weeks or months. Not years. Start out fast and keep trying to pick up speed. *Leave skid marks*" (p. 44).

Sequence of Data Collection and Intervention

Staff members, students, and parents of students attending Sparkling Springs

Elementary School all served as data sources for this research. Student data consisted

entirely of data that the school routinely collected each year, while the investigator collected

staff and parent data solely for this investigation. Intervention involved staff members only.

Figure 1 depicts the sequence of data collection and intervention associated with this

research.

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│  ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐┌─────────────────┐       │
│  │      Staff      │              │    Students     ││    Parents      │       │
│  └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘└─────────────────┘       │
│  ┌─────────────────┐              ┌─────────────────┐┌─────────────────┐       │
│  │ Distribution and│              │  Collection of  ││ Distribution and│       │
│  │  collection of  │              │    2009-2010    ││  collection of  │       │
│  │ first staff     │              │   reading and   ││  first parent   │       │
│  │    survey       │              │  behavior data  ││     survey      │       │
│  └─────────────────┘              └─────────────────┘└─────────────────┘       │
│          ⇩                                                                      │
│  ┌──────────────┐    ┌───────────────┐                                         │
│  │ Focus groups │⇔   │Implementation │                                         │
│  │ one through  │    │   of ideas    │                                         │
│  │    five      │    │ generated in  │                                         │
│  └──────────────┘    │ focus groups  │                                         │
│          ⇩           └───────────────┘                                         │
│  ┌──────────────┐                                                              │
│  │ Focus group  │                                                              │
│  │     six      │                           ⇩                ⇩                 │
│  └──────────────┘                                                              │
│          ⇩                                                                      │
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│  │ Distribution and│              │  Collection of  ││ Distribution and│       │
│  │  collection of  │              │    2010-2011    ││  collection of  │       │
│  │  second staff   │              │   reading and   ││  second parent  │       │
│  │    survey       │              │  behavior data  ││     survey      │       │
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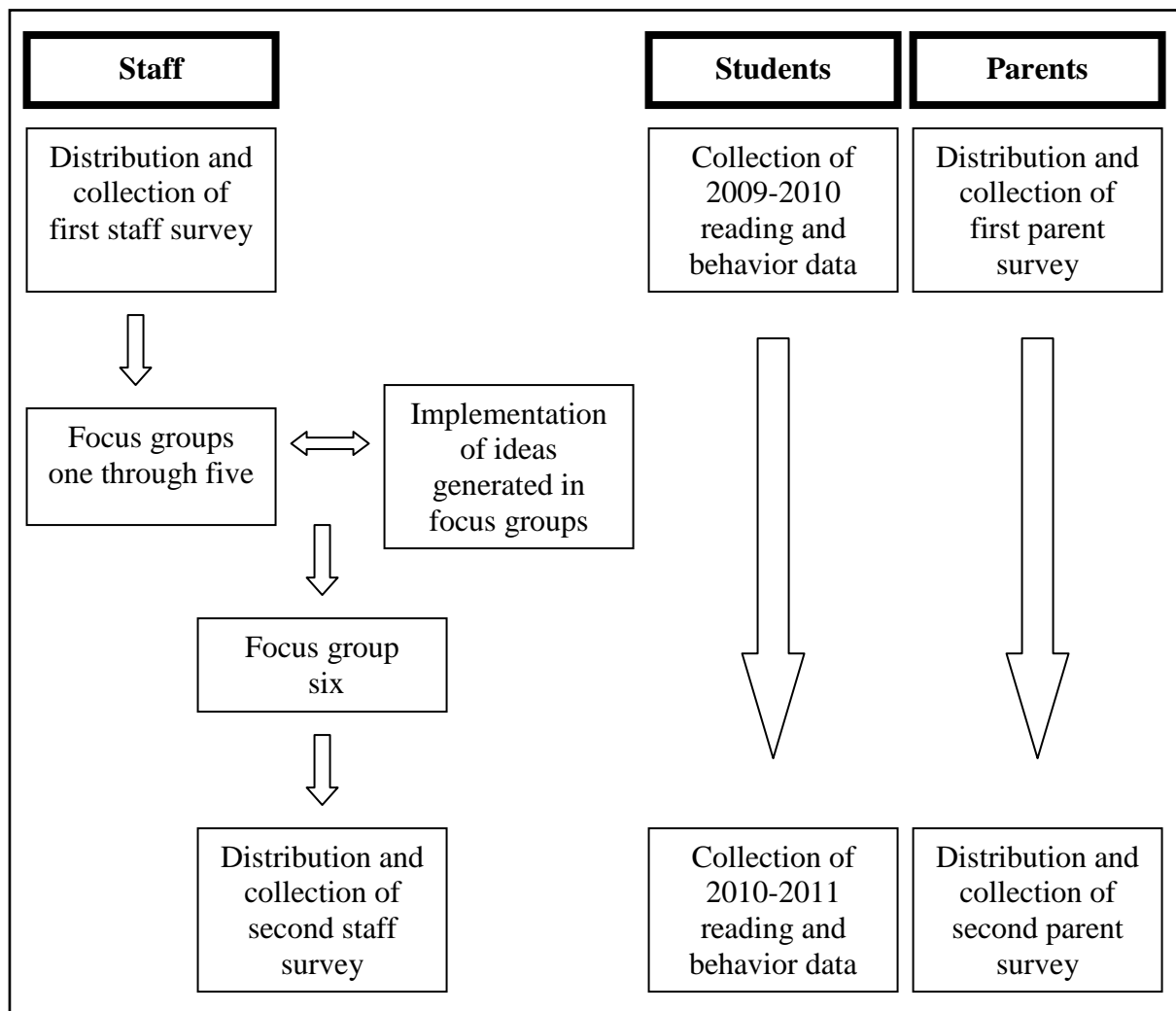
Figure 1. Sequence of data collection and intervention. This flowchart shows data sources
and types, along with sequence of data collection and intervention.

External Validity

External validity, or generalizability, is weak in action research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p.595). If a particular intervention in an action research study is found to be effective, replication is necessary in order for results to be generalized to other groups or individuals, locations, or situations (pp.595-596). In action research, however, the goal is not necessarily generalizability. Rather, the goal "is to solve problems of local concern" (p.595).

Summary

In this investigation, the investigator collected data from staff members, parents, and students. Staff members who chose to participate completed two surveys—pre and post intervention. Staff members also had the opportunity to participate in one or more of six focus groups, and the data from these focus groups provided descriptions of current morale and changes in morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School as well as suggestions for improving staff morale. The intervention consisted of implementing some of these staff-generated suggestions. Parents had the opportunity to complete two surveys—pre and post intervention--related to their perceptions of staff morale and actions. The investigator also collected secondary student data, including student reading levels, as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), reading unit test scores, and behavior referral data. The investigator used the data gathered to describe and compare staff morale pre and post intervention, to compare morale among groups of staff members based on job type and years of experience, to compare staff absences pre and post intervention, to describe parent perceptions of staff morale and actions, and to compare student outcomes before, during, and after intervention.

Chapter Four: Results

This research study examined staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The investigation involved using staff input to develop and implement measures designed to improve staff morale. This study also examined the effects of staff morale on student achievement and behavior, as well as parent perceptions of staff morale. The research investigated the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, and what factors do Sparkling Springs staff members believe contribute to their morale?

2. How do staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School believe that the morale of Sparkling Springs staff members can be improved?

3. How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect Sparkling Springs staff morale and staff member absences during the course of a school year?

4. How do efforts to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale affect the reading achievement and behavior of Sparkling Springs students?

5. How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect parent perception of Sparkling Springs staff morale?

This research also addressed the following hypotheses:

Alternate Hypothesis #1. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of classroom teachers, certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

Alternate Hypothesis #2. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of Sparkling Springs staff members with one to five years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with six to 10 years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with 11-15 years of experience in education, and Sparkling Springs staff members with 16 or more years of experience in education.

Alternate Hypothesis #3. An increase in Sparkling Springs staff member morale, as measured by the survey, will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff member morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #4. A decrease in the number of Sparkling Springs staff member absences within a school year will exist following the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Alternate Hypothesis #5. An increase in the percent of Sparkling Springs students in first through fifth grade reading at or above grade level will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

 Alternate Hypothesis #6. A decrease in the number of behavior referrals for Sparkling Springs students in kindergarten through fifth grade will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

The researcher used two staff member surveys, two parent surveys, six staff focus groups, and historical student data on reading levels and behavior referrals to address the research questions and hypotheses.

Observations from First Staff Survey

The first staff survey provided some notable insights into current staff opinions regarding morale in the workplace, addressing the first research question: What is the current state of staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, and what factors do Sparkling Springs staff members believe contribute to their morale?

While 63% of the 33 respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoy going to work each day, only 39% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "My coworkers enjoy working here," 18% agreed or strongly agreed that "I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers," and 24% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace." At the same time, while 9% of the respondents indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they enjoy going to work each day, 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that "My coworkers enjoy working here," 42% disagreed or strongly disagreed that "I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers," and 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that "My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace." These responses suggested that employees perceived substantial dissatisfaction among their coworkers.

In response to the statement "I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work," 24% of respondents indicated agreement, while no one indicated strong agreement; 39% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. In addition, 21% of employees indicated that "Employees here receive praise and encouragement," while only 3% strongly agreed with this statement; 33% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. These

responses suggested that many employees did not feel that staff members received recognition for work-related accomplishments.

When given the statement, "This is a fun place to work," 27% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 42% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In response to the statement, "Creativity and fun are encouraged here," 27% agreed or strongly agreed, and 45% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These responses suggested that most employees did not perceive their workplace as fun or welcoming of fun.

Responding to the survey item, "I feel valued as a person here," 55% of individuals agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In addition, 33% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "All employees here are treated with dignity and respect," while 36% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These responses suggested significant concerns regarding the treatment of individuals within the workplace.

Individuals completing the staff survey had the opportunity to indicate things that they liked about their job and workplace, and 28 of the 33 participants provided comments on this subject. The most frequent comments related to coworkers and students, with 17 participants mentioning positive relationships with and support from other staff members; and 18 participants indicating enjoying working with students. Comments indicated an overall enjoyment of teaching and other education-related professions within Sparkling Springs Elementary. One staff member stated, "I enjoy overall positive rapport with fellow staff members, and enjoy coming to work. The kids, for the most part, come here eager to learn and willing to grow." Another indicated that, "the workload is overwhelming at times but the staff and students especially, help me get through those hectic days." Several

participants discussed seeing student growth throughout the year as a positive aspect of the job. Another staff member's comments reflected enjoyment of both students and coworkers when she stated

> I like the teaching profession. It is gratifying to see my students develop and grow and master new skills. I enjoy working with the teachers at my grade level. We plan and work well together. We share thoughts and ideas and help one another as needed.

In addition to the common themes of students and coworkers, other positive comments related to administrative support, resources available at the school, the organization of the school or their grade levels, schedules, pay, location, parents, the physical building, teachers' union, spirit days, and staff birthday breakfasts.

Survey participants also had the opportunity to indicate suggestions for the workplace, and 26 of the 33 participants made comments on this topic. While suggestions varied, some recurrent themes included the following: the need for better communication; the importance of consistency when dealing with disruptive student behaviors; the need for all staff members to be treated with respect; the desire for more feedback, encouragement, and recognition; an interest in improving the reward and recognition system for students; a need to encourage creativity and staff-member input; an interest in team-building and collaboration; a desire to encourage focusing on the positives rather than negatives; and an interest in adding fun and motivation to the workplace. Some staff members indicated dissatisfaction and frustration with the current workplace, as evidenced in the following comments:

- "…at times, I fear 'screwing up' and making a mistake is seen as a source of chastisement and not a chance to grow…"

- "Treat teachers as adults and not children."

- "This is a hard place to work sometimes."

- "The atmosphere is not welcoming."

- "The stress level is very high…"

- "More encouragement, instead of always feeling like we're not doing enough."

- "Frustration. Disgust. It's heavy-feeling. There is no joy. Every now and then there's an attempt, but it gets shot down."

- "I cry a lot on the way home."

- "…we're all supposed to be on the same TEAM, lifting each other up, not putting each other down."

Focus Groups

The first focus group addressed the first research question, allowing participants to make observations about current staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School and about factors affecting staff morale. Focus groups two, three, four, and five related to the second research question, asking participants for ideas on how to improve staff morale. The final focus group related to part of research question three, as participants commented on how implementation of the staff-generated suggestions for improving staff morale actually affected staff morale at Sparkling Springs.

Focus group one: Current staff morale. Participants in the first focus group provided observations about current staff morale and factors affecting staff morale. Participants expressed mixed feelings about their own workplace morale, commenting on aspects of the job and workplace that they enjoy as well as frustrations in the workplace. Staff members

agreed that they enjoy the teaching profession and expressed positive feelings toward many colleagues and students. Participants indicated that lack of feedback is a significant source of stress and dissatisfaction. As one staff member said, "I'm not assured enough I guess that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing… I don't even know what … I'm supposed to be doing. I guess I'm unsure what's expected …" Another participant agreed with these feelings when she stated, "…I agree with you, like feeling kind of like unsure, like you kind of want some reassurance that you're … on the right path or headed in the right direction, and I don't … feel like … I've gotten that …"

In describing the overall morale of the workplace, participants cited lack of communication, inequity in workload and expectations among staff members, increasing demands on teachers, lack of respect for teachers' time, lack of fun, and lack of opportunities for creativity as some causes of low morale in the building. Focus group participants made the following comments regarding overall workplace morale:

- "Certainly no rah, yeah, I want to be here… I'd just say it's flat, because there is none…you feel that way when you walk in the building. It's boring. You walk in the front door. It's boring. There's nothing…"

- "They're just kind of like I'm gonna show up and do my job here."

- "… our creativity has been squashed. You can't do what you want anymore at all."

- "And I'm … just putting on that fake smile, and I'm … so not a happy teacher."

When asked if staff morale affects students, focus group participants indicated that they believed it could. Participants acknowledged that the attitudes, feelings, and actions of the teachers and other staff members could influence students. However, participants expressed that they did not believe that parents of students at the school were aware of any staff morale

concerns, because, as one staff member stated, "I think we cover it up pretty well." Others

expressed similar sentiments when they said, "I don't think they know"; "We're pretty good

actors,"; and "…we hide it very well."

Staff members attending the focus group made several suggestions that they believed

would positively impact staff morale. Suggestions included a greater emphasis on positives

rather than negatives within the building, more opportunities for teachers to observe in other

classrooms, adding fun assemblies or other special programs for students, improving the

student reward and recognition system, having fun and motivating activities for the staff, and

rewarding staff members.

Focus group two: Treating staff members well. Staff members participating in the

focus group on treating staff members well expressed that at times, they feel they are treated

with dignity and respect, but at other times, they do not feel this way. One participant

explained that, "It's kind of like we're at the bottom of the so-called totem pole…we have to

take everything from everybody." Another participant indicated that she felt treating

employees well was important when she stated, "I think the way you treat your employees

will kind of determine how they act… their performance. So if you treat me like I'm worth

something, then maybe I will do a little better." Other participants agreed with these

sentiments, suggesting that they would like to be treated well in the workplace.

When asked for suggestions of ways to demonstrate to all staff members their value

and worth, group participants provided the following ideas:

- Improve teacher appreciation week.

- Have a staff member of the month or week.

- Highlight a grade level or group of staff members at the monthly breakfast.

- At conferences and other events where teachers must stay into evening hours, provide snacks or a meal.

- Ask teachers for their input on major purchases.

- Provide notes of appreciation for performance.

- Have a TV in the lounge.

- Provide treats in the lounge once a month.

- Have materials (such as paper for the printer) available to teachers.

- Acknowledge all birthdays; provide a small token in recognition of the birthday.

Focus group participants suggested that the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) could serve as a potential source of funding for some of the suggestions requiring money. Participants also indicated a willingness to pay social dues (which at the time of the investigation, some staff members did not pay) if the money would benefit staff members.

Focus group three: Including staff members in decision-making. When asked how they currently provide input in decision-making within the school, participants in this focus group suggested that they did not feel they had the opportunity to provide input or suggestions for improving the school and that school leaders did not welcome suggestions. One participant indicated that she believed staff members were afraid to make suggestions. She stated, "I think a lot of people are afraid to say anything about changing anything to anyone that's of authority."

When asked to think of ways that the school could encourage staff input, group participants agreed that a suggestion box would allow staff members to provide ideas that could benefit the school. While participants also agreed that staff members could submit their suggestions anonymously, they also felt that having a committee screen the ideas to

select those most relevant and potentially beneficial to the school and then present the ideas

to administration would help to eliminate some of the fear associated with having a staff

member's name connected with an idea. In addition, participants believed that rewarding

staff members for ideas by periodically having a drawing from all ideas submitted would

help to encourage staff members to make suggestions.

      Focus group four: Recognizing and rewarding staff members. Participants in

this focus group all agreed that while they enjoy receiving positive feedback and praise, they

felt that they did not often receive recognition for their hard work. One participant even

stated, "I really don't think we get recognized for anything." Some participants expressed

that they believed some staff members received recognition, and as one participant stated, "It

seems like other people besides the teachers are rewarded for…[and] recognized for

everything they do, but the people like us who are doing all the work don't get recognized for

anything." Another focus group participant explained that she receives positive feedback

primarily when she receives her performance evaluation, which may occur as often as once

per year or as infrequently as once every several years.

      When asked to identify specific accomplishments or efforts worth recognizing and

rewarding, all participants agreed that grade-level or team accomplishments related to student

achievement would be worth recognizing and rewarding. A face-to-face meeting to provide

positive feedback or providing lunch for the team were ways that participants expressed

interest in receiving recognition. Staff members also indicated that small tangible items,

food, or time (extra plan time or extra time for lunch) were ways that they would enjoy being

rewarded for accomplishments. Several participants also mentioned that providing a way for

staff members to compliment or praise each other could be a meaningful form of recognition.

Funding for rewards could come from PTA funds or from dues that teachers pay to the

school's Social Committee.

      Focus group five: Adding fun to the workplace. When presented with research

suggesting that fun in the workplace is associated with higher productivity, all participants

readily agreed that they believed they were more productive when having fun. Staff

members expressed that they are more willing to go to a job they enjoy and are more willing

to "go the extra mile" when they enjoy their work. When asked if Sparkling Springs

Elementary School is a fun place to work, participants were unanimous in their reply of "no."

One staff member explained that "there's nothing to look forward to ever," while another

stated that "it seems very cold here." One participant expressed that "…it's not fun when

you come and you feel like you're the bottom of everything, the bottom of the totem pole,

and everybody's telling you what to do." One participant mentioned that she feels that the

school "… puts on a good front that we're a fun, positive school … but they never follow

through with it" and expressed disappointment for both the students and the staff members

when the positive things that are promised do not happen.

      When asked for ideas of ways to add fun to the workplace, participants mentioned

several ideas:

- Planning holiday celebrations

- Having regular theme food days, for which all staff members would bring

  something to share

- Holding an ornament exchange and Secret Santas for Christmas

- Planning staff member outings during winter break and summer break

- Inviting staff members to go out together to a restaurant

- Starting a walking group to walk the track together after school

- Asking staff members to sign up to plan fun events for each month

- Forming committees to plan events

As with ideas developed at other focus groups, participants indicated that sources of funding could include PTA funds or Social Committee dues.

Focus group six: Revisiting staff morale. This final focus group followed implementation of all interventions associated with this study. When asked to describe the current morale of staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, including any observed changes during the course of the school year, participants indicated that they "think it seems better now than it did at the beginning of the year. It seems to have improved." Participants agreed that they believed the efforts made during the school year to improve staff morale had, in fact, improved staff morale. One staff member explained that "it's the little things" that make a difference in morale, while another staff member expressed excitement in being able to look forward to fun events and activities that were implemented this school year. Participants cited specific morale-boosting measures that they enjoyed and appreciated, including the use of a staff suggestion box, the staff Easter egg hunt, the sign-up fair (to recruit ideas and involvement for activities next school year), and the rewarding of staff members for sharing ideas and for participation. One staff member stated that "morale must be better because you got a lot of people to sign up" to participate in planning and implementing activities for next year, as she believed that dissatisfied and unhappy people would not be interesting in volunteering their time and effort for work-related activities that were not required.

Participants in this focus group agreed that not only did the attempts to improve

morale positively affect staff members, but that students may have benefitted as well,

because "happier teachers" lead to "happier kids." One staff member indicated that the

morale of staff members may affect parents, and another participant expanded on that idea,

explaining that if parents notice that staff members get along with each other, work well

together, and seem to enjoy each other, then they will have a more positive view of the

school.

When asked what the next steps in addressing morale should be, participants agreed

upon the importance of getting staff members involved in planning and carrying out fun

activities for next. All participants in this focus group expressed an interest in continuing and

expanding on activities that provide opportunities for staff members to encourage and

support each other and to have fun together, and they all agreed on the value of being able to

look forward to something special or fun.

Implementation of Morale-Boosting Measures Generated in Focus Groups

The purpose of the first five focus groups was to gather information about morale at

Sparkling Springs Elementary School and to have staff members generate ideas about

improving staff morale within the school. The intervention portion of this research consisted

of implementing ideas from staff members during the second semester of the school year.

Suggestion Box. In response to focus group participants' interest in a suggestion

box, the investigator created a suggestion box and a form for submitting suggestions. She

sent an e-mail to inform all staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School that the

suggestion box was available to all staff members and asked for staff members to volunteer

to be part of a committee to review suggestions. Two staff members agreed to serve on the

committee, and six staff members submitted suggestions during the time of this study. The

review committee met monthly to determine what action to take based on the suggestions.

As a result of the ideas that staff members submitted, the school's instructional specialist

agreed to purchase an electric pencil sharpener for staff use, and the investigator agreed to

compile a staff birthday list to post in the staff lounge. All staff members who included their

names when submitting suggestions, whether or not the ideas were implemented, were

entered in a monthly drawing for gift cards. The researcher sent out occasional e-mails to

remind staff members of the availability of the suggestion box, to acknowledge staff

members who submitted ideas, and to update staff members of actions taken as a result of

ideas that staff members submitted.

Staff Biographies. The investigator created and asked staff members to complete a

one-page biography. This brief biography included information about family, pets, hobbies,

previous jobs, favorite foods, favorite stores and restaurants, favorite quotes, and other

information that individuals wanted to share with coworkers. The investigator explained that

the biographies would be used during the following school year to highlight one group of

individuals per month (for example, cafeteria workers in August, fifth grade teachers in

September, etc.) with a bulletin board display in the staff lounge, as suggested by focus group

participants. Staff members would have the opportunity to write positive comments about

highlighted individuals during that month, and by the end of the school year, every individual

would have had a turn to be recognized.

Earth Day Activity. Many focus group participants indicated an interest in more fun

staff activities. In an effort to provide some fun activities, the investigator asked all staff

members to e-mail their earth-friendly tips in honor of Earth Day. The investigator then

compiled the tips and e-mailed them to all staff members. Six staff members submitted

ideas, many of whom submitted multiple ideas, and all participants received an earth-friendly

prize.

      Easter Egg Hunt. In another attempt to add fun to the workplace, the researcher

invited all staff members to participate in an after-school Easter egg hunt on the school

grounds. Approximately 15 staff members attended. All participants received candy and

prizes. During this event and for weeks after, the investigator received numerous e-mails and

verbal comments expressing how much staff members enjoyed this event and were looking

forward to additional fun activities.

      Sign-Up Fair. Because staff members made many suggestions at focus groups that

were not implemented during the 2010-2011 school year, and in an attempt to include more

staff members in planning and implementing staff activities, the researcher invited all staff

members to attend a sign-up fair and to sign up for one or more committees for next school

year. The hours of the sign-up fair included times during and after school to accommodate

staff member schedules. The event included refreshments, and all participants had the

opportunity to enter their names in prize drawings. The committees available for staff sign-

up included the following: welcome back to school staff activity (August), welcome back to

school staff activity (January), staff birthday recognition, first quarter staff activity, second

quarter staff activity, third quarter staff activity, fourth quarter staff activity, staff game

committee, and suggestion review committee. Approximately 25 staff members attended,

many of whom signed up for one or more committees. Staff members made many positive

comments about enjoying the opportunity to volunteer to plan fun events and about looking

forward to those fun events during the next school year.

Research Support for Intervention. Treating employees well, involving employees in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding employee achievements, and making work fun are recurring themes in literature on improving morale. The staff-generated ideas that the researcher implemented in an attempt to boost morale echoed these themes. The suggestion box provided a way to include staff members in decision-making and to recognize and reward them for their ideas. Collecting biographies in order to highlight a group of staff members each month offered a way for staff members to get to know each other as people, which may encourage staff members to treat each other well, and it also provided a way to recognize all staff members during the course of a school year. Both the Earth Day tips activity and the Easter egg hunt involved adding fun to the workplace, while the sign-up fair provided fun and involved staff members in decision-making.

Observations from Second Staff Survey

Examining the responses from the 20 staff members who completed the second staff survey helped to address the third research question: How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect Sparkling Springs staff morale and staff member absences during the course of a school year? Comparing results from the first and second staff surveys provided some insights into changes in staff feelings during the period of this study. Table 3 compares pre and post survey responses related to employee perceptions of fun, recognition, treatment of employees, and overall job satisfaction. Table 4 compares pre and post survey responses related to perceptions of coworker satisfaction.

Table 3

Percentage Agreement or Strong Agreement: Pre and Post Survey Comparison

Survey Item	First Survey	Second Survey
I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work.	24	50
This is a fun place to work.	27	45
Creativity and fun are encouraged here.	27	45
All employees here are treated with dignity and respect.	33	50
I am satisfied with my job and my workplace.	3	20

The responses shown in Table 3 indicate an increase in positive feelings toward the workplace.   Employees felt some improvement occurred in the rewarding and recognition of their achievements. Rewarding individuals for contributing ideas to the suggestion box and collecting staff biographies to highlight each staff member may have influenced this perception. Participant responses also indicated an increase in employee perception that their workplace was fun or welcoming of fun. The Earth Day activity, Easter egg hunt, and sign-up fair may have promoted this perception of increased fun in the workplace. Involving employees in workplace improvements and events with the suggestion box and the sign-up fair, along with using staff biographies to recognize individuals may have contributed to the positive changes in participant views of treatment of individuals within the workplace.   All aspects of the intervention may have created a more encouraging and optimistic work environment, leading to positive changes in perceptions of workplace satisfaction.

Table 4

Perception of Coworker Satisfaction: Pre and Post Survey Percentage Comparison

Survey Item		First Survey	Second Survey
My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace.	Agree or strongly agree	24	35
	Disagree or strongly disagree	30	20
I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.	Agree or strongly agree	18	40
	Disagree or strongly disagree	42	20

Responses shown in Table 4 indicate both an increase in agree or strongly agree responses and a decrease in disagree or strongly disagree responses. These responses suggested some positive changes in employee perceptions of satisfaction among their coworkers. As employees utilized the suggestion box and participated in the Earth Day activity, Easter egg hunt, and sign-up fair, individuals talked with others about the fun they had and how they hoped that such events would continue. Hearing comments that were positive and that reflected hope for continued improvement in the future may have contributed to perceptions of increased coworker satisfaction.

Individuals completing the staff survey had the opportunity to indicate things that they liked about their job and workplace, and 18 of the 20 participants provided comments on this subject. As with the first survey, many comments related to coworkers and students, with 13 participants mentioning positive relationships with and support from other staff members; and 13 participants indicating enjoying working with students. Six individuals

specifically mentioned activities that were part of the intervention in this research as things they liked about their current job or workplace. One staff member indicated that, "I really enjoy the new things" that staff members have been able to participate in this year, while another staff member expressed liking the "recent addition of some fun staff activities." Another respondent stated, "This year there has been improvement in staff morale because of fun activities—ex, egg hunt, sign up fair, etc. If these types of activities continue, I think it will continue to make people excited about work."   In addition to the common themes of students, coworkers, and new activities this year, other positive comments related to the following: administrative support, resources available at the school, the organization of the school or grade level, location of the school, schedules, and the physical building.

Survey participants also had the opportunity to indicate suggestions for the workplace, and 11 of the 20 participants made comments on this topic. Some respondents indicated that they would like to see fun staff activities continue in the future. Other comments revolved around the need for appropriately dealing with student behaviors, a desire for more team building within the school, and the importance of praising and encouraging all staff members.   While in this portion of the first survey, many staff members expressed significant dissatisfaction and frustration, the comments on the second survey were markedly different. While some of them indicated a genuine desire for change, respondents stated their comments in more positive ways, without the expressions of fear, stress, frustration, and disgust that were present in the first survey comments.

The third research question also addressed the impact of the intervention on staff member absences. Individuals reported their total absences for the 2009-2010 school year and for the 2010-2011 school year. The total number of absences for the 18 respondents was

125 during the 2009-2010 school year and 128 during the 2010-2011 school year,

representing a slight increase. Table 5 compares absences for the two school years, showing

the number of staff members whose absences increased, decreased, and remained the same.

The statistical analysis section regarding absences contains a detailed discussion of the

significance of these observations.

Table 5

Comparison of Staff Member Absences from 2009-2010 and 2010-2011

Staff Members with Increased Absences	Staff Members with Decreased Absences	Staff Members with Same Number of Absences
6	8	4

Note: Numbers represent the 18 total staff members who provided total absences in both the pre
and post survey.

Analysis of Staff Survey Data

Alternate Hypothesis # 1. The first alternate hypothesis states that a difference exists

in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of classroom teachers, certified non-classroom

teachers, and classified staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

Analysis using chi-square test for independence.   To address alternate hypothesis

#1, the investigator selected five representative survey items. The five representative

statements were the following: *I enjoy going to work each day*; *All employees here are*

treated with dignity and respect; *I have the opportunity to provide input about important*

decisions in my workplace; *Employees here receive praise and encouragement*; and *This is a*

fun place to work. The investigator sorted the completed surveys by job type (classroom

teachers, certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members) and calculated the

percent of respondents in each category who agreed or strongly agreed with each of the five

statements. The researcher then used a chi-square test for independence to test the following

hypotheses:

H_0 = Job satisfaction and morale are independent of type of position held.

H_1 = Job satisfaction and morale are dependent on the type of position held:

classroom, certified non-classroom, or classified staff.

Using α = .05, the critical value for the test was 15.507 and the test value for the first

set of surveys was 21.485, which resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis because 21.485 is

greater than 15.507. This supported the hypothesis that job satisfaction and morale were

dependent on job type.

The investigator repeated this process using the completed second surveys to test the

same hypotheses. Again, using α = .05, the critical value for the test was 15.507. The test

value with the data from the second set of surveys was 44.663, which resulted in rejecting the

null hypothesis since 44.663 is greater than 15.507. Therefore, for both surveys—pre and

post intervention—the test results supported the hypothesis that job satisfaction and morale

were dependent on type of position held.

The researcher calculated the percent of respondents who disagreed or strongly

disagreed with each of the same five representative survey statements. Using both the first

and second survey data, the researcher tested the following hypotheses:

H_0 = Job satisfaction and morale are independent of type of position held.

H_1 = Job satisfaction and morale are dependent on the type of position held:

classroom, certified non-classroom, or classified staff.

Using α = .05, the critical value for the chi-square test for independence was 15.507.

The test value using data from the first survey was 57.821, resulting in rejecting the null

hypothesis because 57.821 is greater than 15.507. Using data from the second survey, the

test value was 68.559, which also resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis since 68.559 is

greater than 15.507. Therefore, for both surveys, the test results supported the hypothesis

that job satisfaction and morale were dependent on job type.

Comparison of survey responses based on job type. Examining survey responses for

participants with different job types supported the findings from the chi-square test for

independence. Some notable differences existed in the ways that staff members with

different job types responded to survey items on the first staff survey. Figure 2 shows four

survey items for which important differences existed in the percent of participants in each

job-type category who agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 3 shows four survey items with

noteworthy differences in the percent of participants in each job-type category who disagreed

or strongly disagreed.

Figure 2. First staff survey agreement by job type. Job types included classroom teachers, other certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members. Percent of respondents in each category who agreed or strongly agreed with four survey items on first staff survey is displayed: A—My coworkers enjoy working here; B—All employees here are treated with dignity and respect; C—I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers; D—Employees here receive praise and encouragement.

Figure 3. First staff survey disagreement by job type. Job types included classroom teachers, other certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members. Percent of respondents in each category who disagreed or strongly disagreed with four survey items on first staff survey is displayed: A—This is a fun place to work; B—I have the opportunity to provide input about important decisions in my workplace; C—Creativity and fun are encouraged here; D—I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.

In addition, on the first staff survey, there were nine items with which no classroom teachers strongly agreed, six items with which no other certified staff members strongly agreed, and five survey statements with which no classified staff members strongly agreed. Also in the first survey, there were four statements with which no classroom teachers strongly disagreed, three survey items with which no other certified staff members strongly disagreed, and five items with which no classified staff members strongly disagreed.

The findings of the second staff survey also supported the results of the chi-square test for independence, as participant responses revealed differences in the responses of staff

members with different job types on some survey items. Figure 4 shows six survey items for

which important differences existed in the percent of participants in each job-type category

who agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 5 shows four survey items with noteworthy

differences in the percent of participants in each job-type category who disagreed or strongly
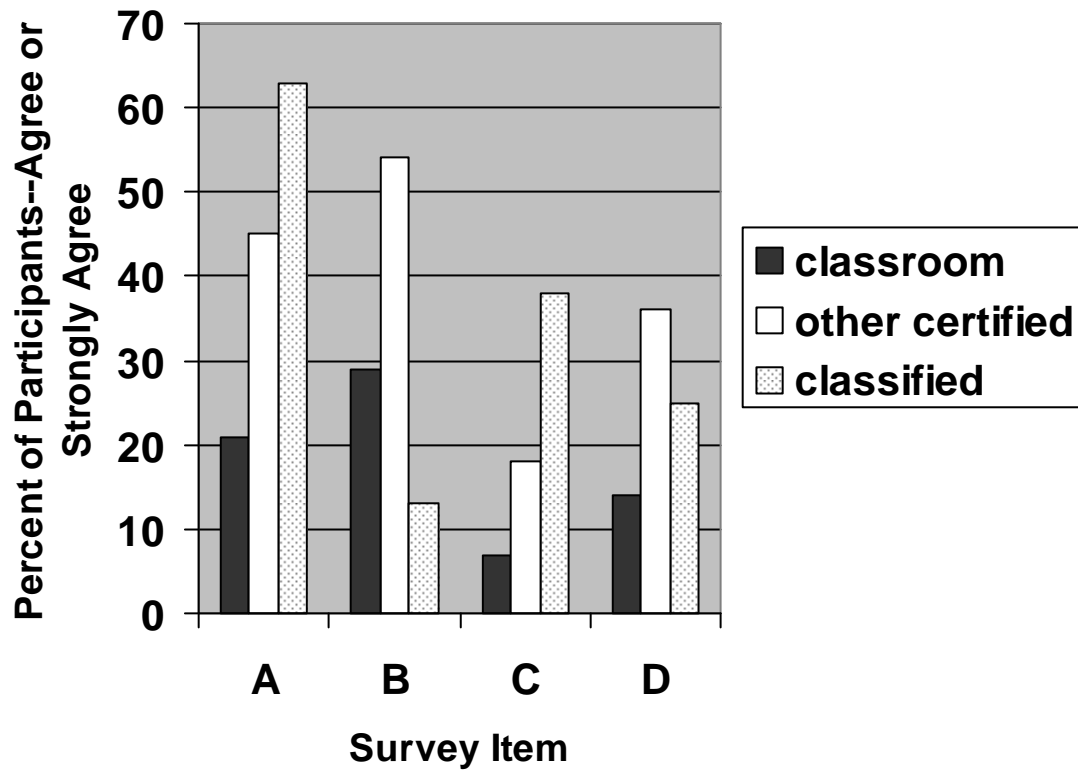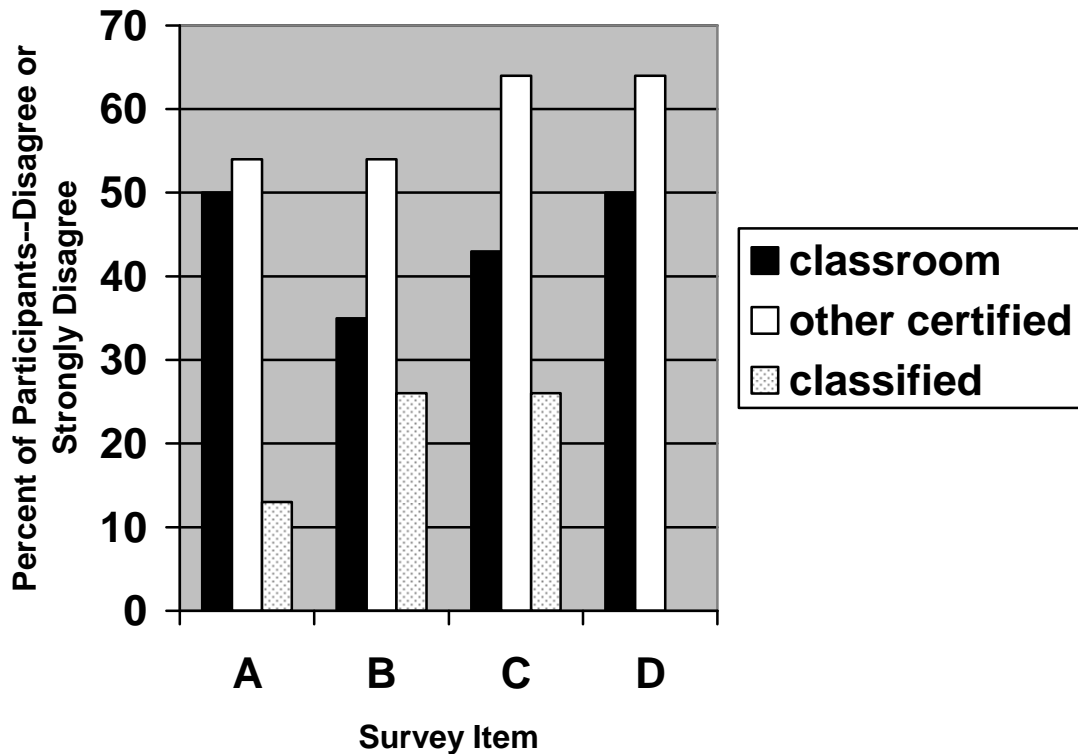
disagreed.

Figure 4. Second staff survey agreement by job type. Job types included classroom
teachers, other certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members. Percent of
respondents in each category who agreed or strongly agreed with six survey items on second
staff survey is displayed: A—I enjoy going to work each day; B—My ideas and suggestions
are valued at work; C—All employees here are treated with dignity and respect; D—I am
satisfied with my job and my workplace; E—I hear positive comments about our workplace
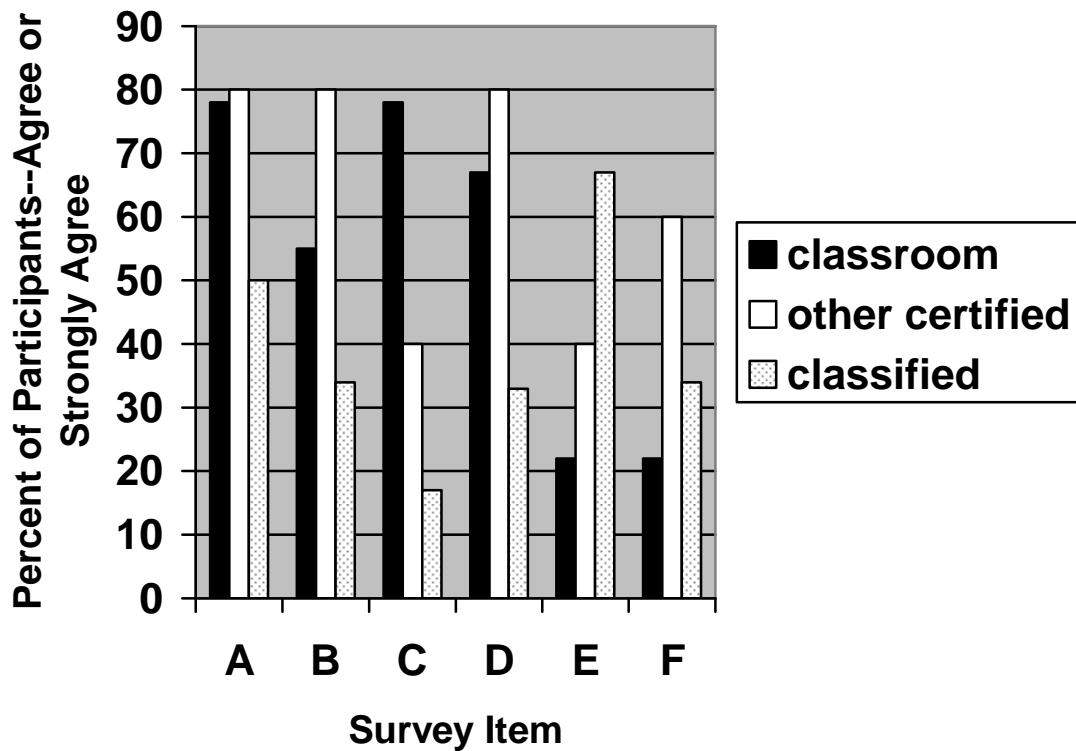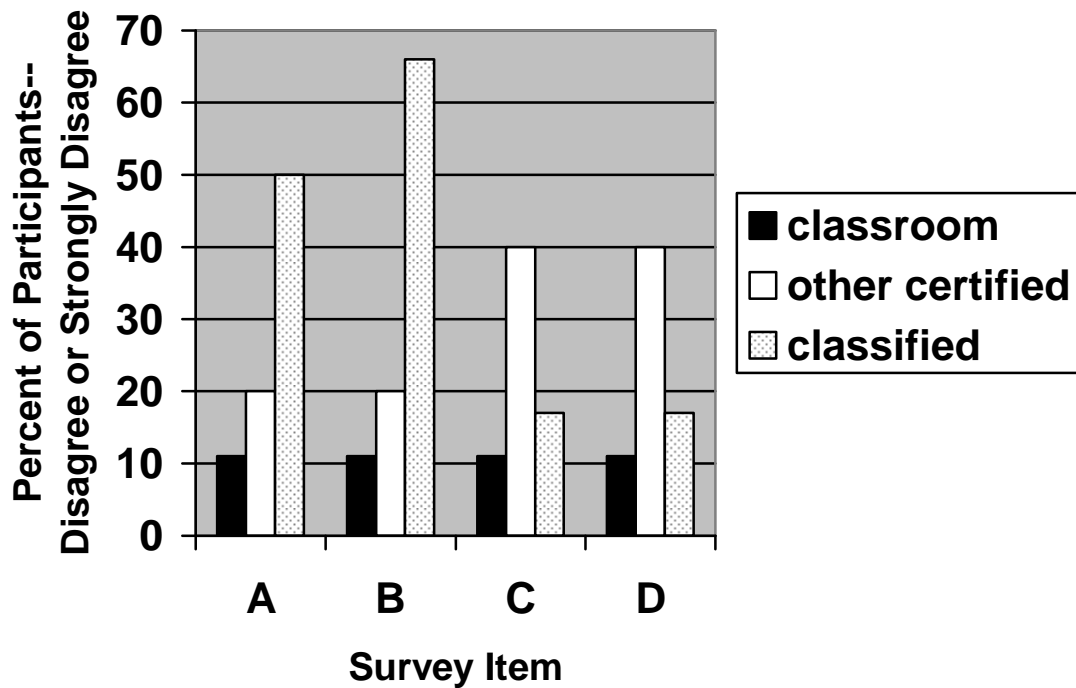from my coworkers; F—Employees here receive praise and encouragement.

Figure 5. Second staff survey disagreement by job type. Job types included classroom teachers, other certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members. Percent of respondents in each category who disagreed or strongly disagreed with four survey items on second staff survey is displayed: A—I feel valued as a person here; B—All employees here are treated with dignity and respect; C—My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace; D—I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.

On the second staff survey, there were nine items with which no classroom teachers strongly agreed, three items with which no other certified staff members strongly agreed, and three survey statements with which no classified staff members strongly agreed. Also on the second survey, there were 10 statements with which no classroom teachers strongly disagreed, 11 survey items with which no other certified staff members strongly disagreed, and seven items with which no classified staff members strongly disagreed.

Both the statistical analyses and close examination of survey responses revealed that there were significant differences in the survey responses of staff members with various job types. These differences existed in both the first and second staff surveys.

Alternate Hypothesis # 2. Alternate hypothesis #2 states that a difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of Sparkling Springs staff members with one to five years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with six to 10 years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with 11-15 years of experience in education, and Sparkling Springs staff members with 16 or more years of experience in education.

Analysis using chi-square test for independence. To address this hypothesis, the investigator used the same five representative statements as used to test alternate hypothesis #1. This time, the investigator sorted the surveys by years of experience in education (one to five, six to 10, 11-15, and 16 or more). After calculating the percent of respondents in each category who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement, the investigatory used a chi-square test for independence to address the following hypotheses:

H_0 = Job satisfaction and morale are independent of years of experience in education.

H_1= Job satisfaction and morale are dependent on years of experience in education.

Using α = .05, the critical value for the test was 21.026 and the test value for the data from the first set of surveys was 84.562, which resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis because 84.562 is greater than 21.026. This supported the hypothesis that job satisfaction and morale were dependent on years of experience in education.

The investigator repeated this process using the completed second surveys to test the same hypotheses. Again, using α = .05, the critical value for the test was 21.026. The test value with the data from the second set of surveys was 235.609, which resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis since 235.609 is greater than 21.026. Therefore, for both surveys—pre

and post intervention—the test results supported the hypothesis that job satisfaction and

morale were dependent on years of experience in education.

Examining disagreement and strong disagreement with survey statements this time,

the investigator used the same five survey statements and a similar process to test the

following hypotheses:

H_0 = Job satisfaction and morale are independent of years of experience in education.

H_1= Job satisfaction and morale are dependent on years of experience in education.

Using α = .05, the critical value for the test was 21.026. The test value using data

from the first survey was 54.753, resulting in rejecting the null hypothesis because 54.753 is

greater than 21.026. Using data from the second survey, the test value was 292.384, which

also resulted in rejecting the null hypothesis since 292.384 is greater than 21.026. So, for

both surveys, the chi-square test for independence results supported the hypothesis that job

satisfaction and morale were dependent on years of experience in education.

Comparison of survey responses based on years of experience. Examining survey

responses revealed some considerable differences in the ways that staff members with

various years of experience in education responded to survey items on the first staff survey,

thus supporting the findings of the chi-square test for independence. Figure 6 shows six

survey items for which important differences existed in the percent of participants in each

years-of-experience category who agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 7 shows seven survey

items with noteworthy differences in the percent of participants in each years-of-experience

category who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 6. First staff survey agreement by years of experience. Years-of-experience categories included one to five years, six to 10 years, 11 to 15 years, and 16 or more years. Percent of respondents in each category who agreed or strongly agreed with six survey items on first staff survey is displayed: A—I enjoy going to work each day; B—My coworkers enjoy working here; C—I feel valued as a person here; D—My ideas and suggestions are valued at work; E—I am satisfied with my job and my workplace; F—Creativity and fun are encouraged here.
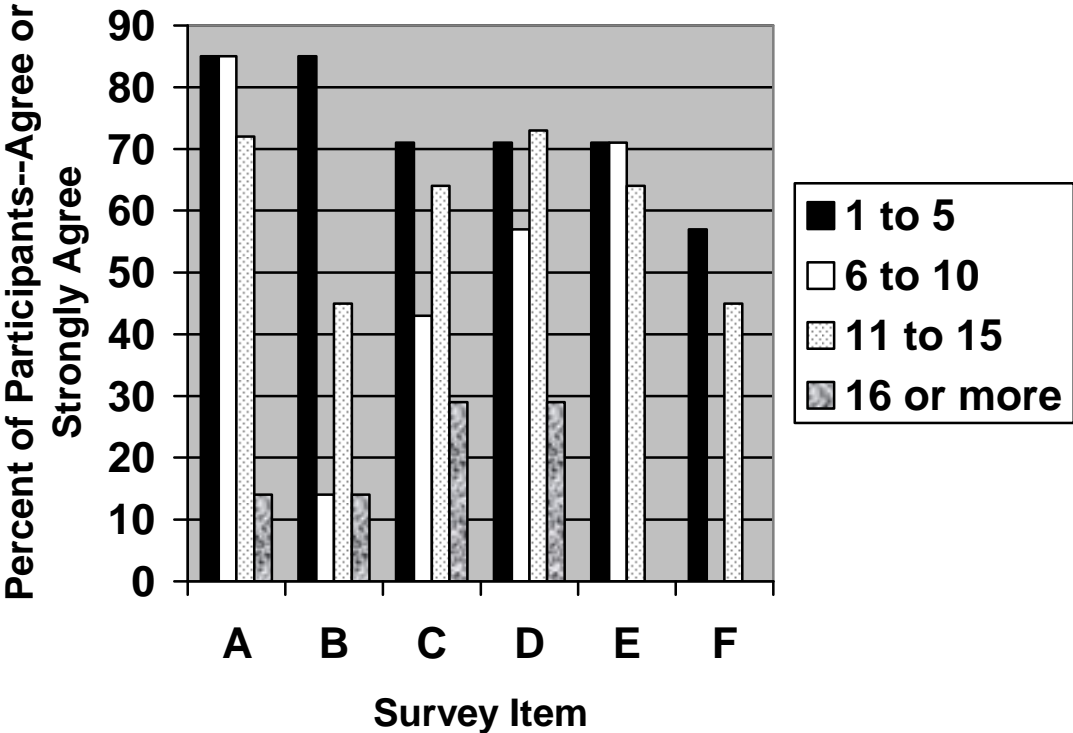
Figure 7. First staff survey disagreement by years of experience. Years-of-experience categories included one to five years, six to 10 years, 11 to 15 years, and 16 or more years. Percent of respondents in each category who disagreed or strongly disagreed with seven survey items on first staff survey is displayed: A—I feel valued as a person here; B—My ideas and suggestions are valued at work; C—This is a fun place to work; D—I am satisfied with my job and my workplace; E—My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace; F—Creativity and fun are encouraged here; G—I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.

Examining the first staff survey further, there were five items with which no participants with one to five years of experience strongly agreed, 12 items with which no staff members with six to 10 years of experience strongly agreed, four survey statements with which no respondents with 11 to 15 years of experience members strongly agreed, and 12 items with which no staff members with 16 or more years of experience strongly agreed. In fact, no staff member with 16 or more years of experience strongly agreed or agreed with any of the following eight statements on the first survey:

- I am recognized and rewarded for my achievement at work.

- This is a fun place to work.

- All employees here are treated with dignity and respect.

- I am satisfied with my job and my workplace.

- My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace.

- Creativity and fun are encouraged here.

- I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.

- Employees here receive praise and encouragement.

In all the other years-of-experience category, there was only one survey item that had no agree or strongly agree responses. In the six to 10 years category, no one agreed or strongly agreed with the survey statement, "Creativity and fun are encouraged here."

 Also in the first survey, there were 13 statements—every survey item--with which no staff members with one to five years of experience strongly disagreed—and five of these statements also had no "disagree" responders, nine items with which no staff members with six to 10 years of experience strongly disagreed, 12 survey statements with which no respondents with 11 to 15 years of experience members strongly disagreed—and one of these statements had no "disagree" responders, and one item with which no staff members with 16 or more years of experience strongly disagreed.

The findings of the second staff survey also supported the chi-square test for independence, as participant responses revealed differences in the ways that staff members with various years of experience in education responded to survey items. Figure 8 shows seven survey items for which important differences existed in the percent of participants in each years-of-experience category who agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 9 shows five

survey items with noteworthy differences in the percent of participants in each years-of-

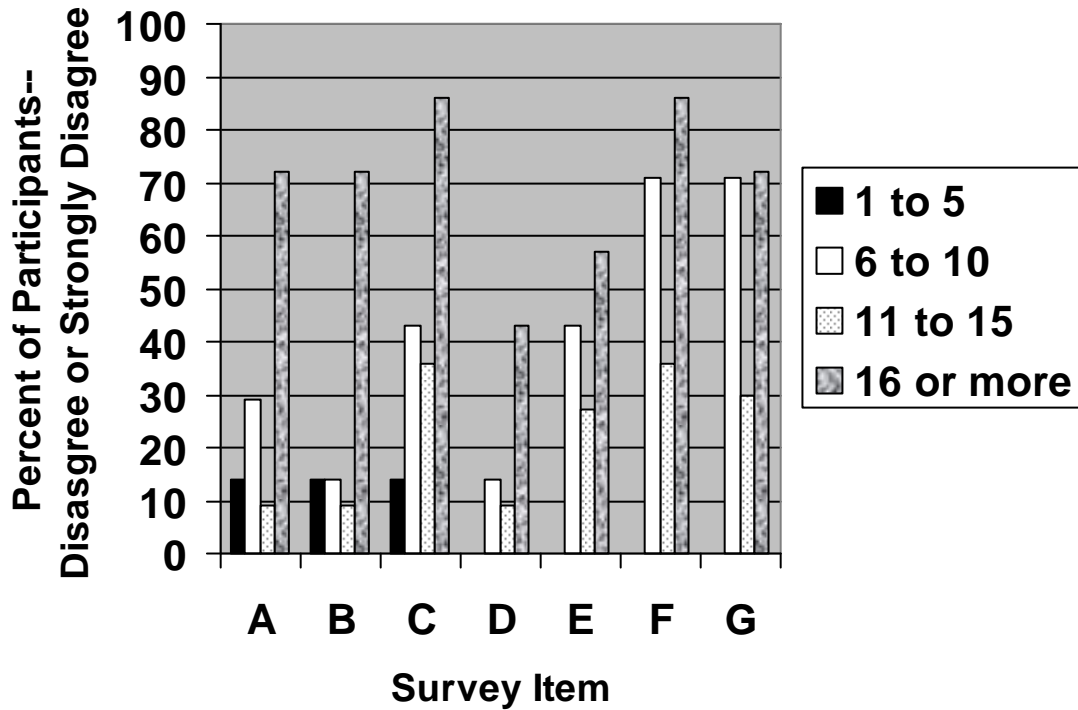experience category who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 8. Second staff survey agreement by years of experience. Years-of-experience categories included one to five years, six to 10 years, 11 to 15 years, and 16 or more years. Percent of respondents in each category who agreed or strongly agreed with seven survey items on second staff survey is displayed: A—I enjoy going to work each day; B—My coworkers enjoy working here; C—I feel valued as a person here; D—This is a fun place to work; E—All employees here are treated with dignity and respect; F—I am satisfied with my job and my workplace; G—Creativity and fun are encouraged here.
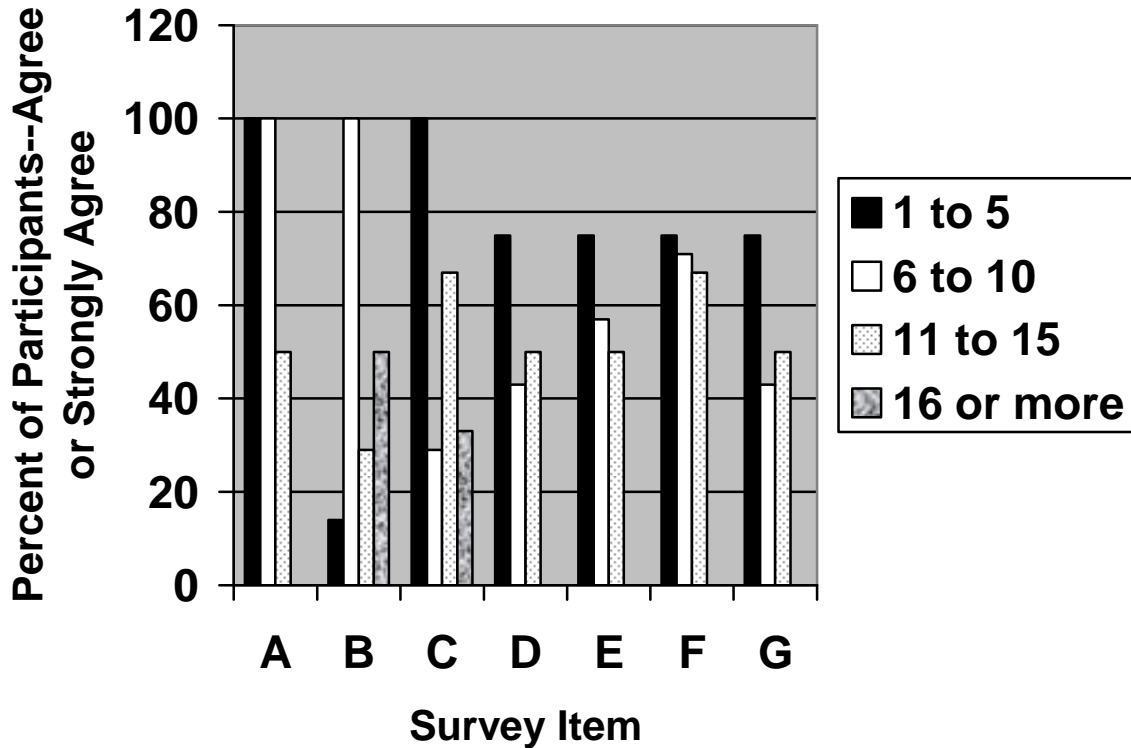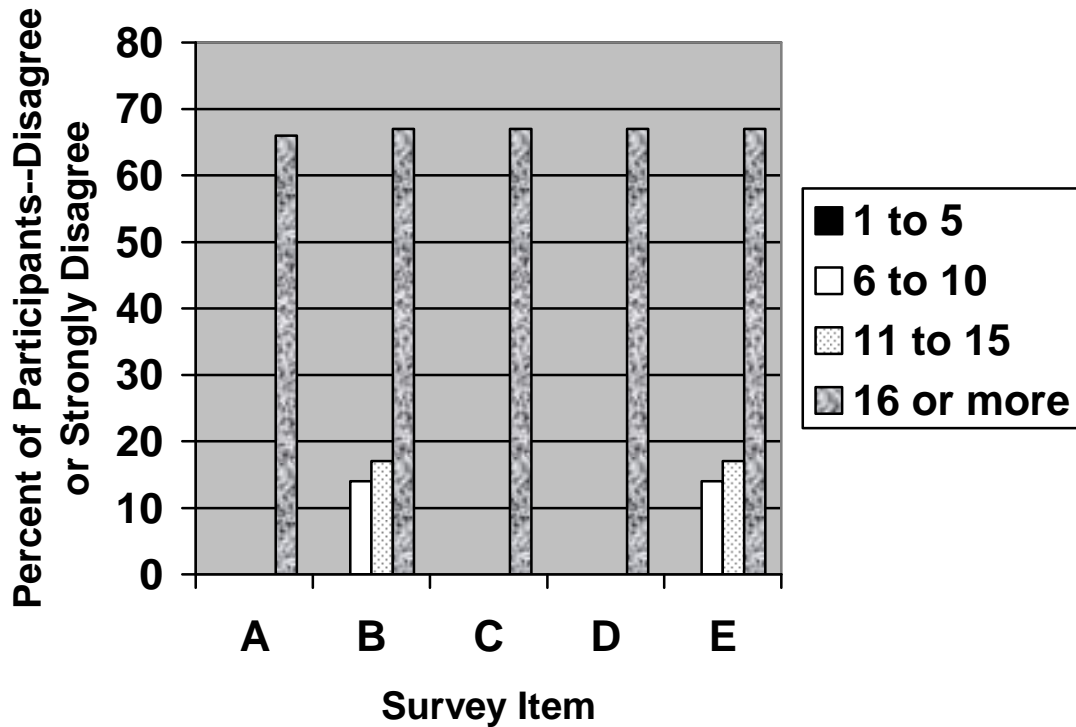
Figure 9. Second staff survey disagreement by years of experience. Years-of-experience categories included one to five years, six to 10 years, 11 to 15 years, and 16 or more years. Percent of respondents in each category who disagreed or strongly disagreed with five survey items on second staff survey is displayed: A—I enjoy going to work each day; B—My ideas and suggestions are valued at work; C—This is a fun place to work; D—I am satisfied with my job and my workplace; E—I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.

Additional examination of the second staff survey showed that there were three items with which no participants with one to five years of experience strongly agreed, 11 items with which no staff members with six to 10 years of experience strongly agreed, three survey statements with which no respondents with 11 to 15 years of experience members strongly agreed, and 13 items—every item in the survey-- with which no staff members with 16 or more years of experience strongly agreed. In fact, no staff member with 16 or more years of experience strongly agreed or agreed with any of the following ten statements on the second survey:

- I enjoy going to work each day.

- My coworkers enjoy working here.

- My suggestions and ideas are valued at work.

- I am recognized and rewarded for my achievement at work.

- This is a fun place to work.

- I have the opportunity to provide input about important decisions in my workplace.

- All employees here are treated with dignity and respect.

- I am satisfied with my job and my workplace.

- My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace.

- Creativity and fun are encouraged here.

In all the other years-of-experience category, there were no survey items that had no agree or strongly agree responses.

In the second survey, there were 11 statements with which no staff members with one to five years of experience strongly disagreed—and nine of these statements also had no "disagree" responders, twelve items with which no staff members with six to 10 years of experience strongly disagreed—four of which had no "disagree" responses, 10 survey statements with which no respondents with 11 to 15 years of experience members strongly disagreed—and three of these statements also had no "disagree" responders, and seven items with which no staff members with 16 or more years of experience strongly disagreed—one of which also had no "disagree" responses.

Both the statistical analyses and close comparison of survey responses revealed that there were notable differences in the survey responses of staff members with various

amounts of experience in education. These differences existed in both the first and second staff surveys.

Alternate Hypothesis # 3. Alternate hypothesis #3 states that an increase in Sparkling Springs staff member morale, as measured by the survey, will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff member morale.

Analysis using t-test for dependent samples. The investigator matched the first and second surveys, using the unique identifying number, to establish a person-to-self comparison pre and post intervention. The researcher tabulated X_1, the number of statements with which an individual agreed or strongly agreed in the first survey, and X_2, the number of statements with which an individual agreed or strongly agreed in the second survey.   The investigator conducted a *t*-test for dependent samples to test the following hypotheses related to agreement with statements:

H_0: Agreement or strong agreement with survey statements related to workplace

morale will remain the same or decrease following intervention. ($\mu_D \leq 0$)

H_1: Agreement or strong agreement with survey statements related to workplace

morale will increase following intervention. ($\mu_D > 0$)

Using $\alpha = .05$, the critical value for this left-tailed test was -1.729. The test value was -1.893, so the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and there was adequate evidence to support the claim that agreement or strong agreement with survey statements related to workplace morale increased following implementation of measures designed to improve staff morale.

The investigator conducted another *t*-test for dependent samples to test the following

hypotheses related to disagreement with statements:

H$_0$: Disagreement or strong disagreement with survey statements related to

workplace morale will remain the same or increase following intervention.

($\mu_D \geq 0$)

H$_1$: Disagreement or strong disagreement with survey statements related to

workplace morale will decrease following intervention. ($\mu_D < 0$)

This time X$_1$ was the number of statements with which an individual disagreed or strongly

disagreed in the first survey, and X$_2$ was the number of statements with which an individual

disagreed or strongly disagreed in the second survey. Using $\alpha = .05$, the critical value for this

right-tailed test was 1.729, and the test value was 2.416. Therefore, there was adequate

evidence to reject the null hypothesis and to support the claim that disagreement and strong

disagreement with survey statements related to workplace morale decreased following

implementation of measures designed to improve staff morale.

Comparison of first and second survey responses. The comparison of specific

survey item responses pre and post intervention provided support for the findings of the *t*-

tests for dependent samples that resulted in supporting the claims that agreement and strong

agreement with survey statements related to workplace morale increased following

intervention while disagreement and strong disagreement decreased following intervention.

While the percent of employees responding to survey items with a specific level of

agreement changed little on certain items, other survey items revealed sizeable differences in

responses pre and post intervention. Figure 10 compares the percent of employees who

agreed or strongly agreed with each survey statement in the first and second surveys, while

Figure 11 compares the percent of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with each survey statement in the first and second surveys.
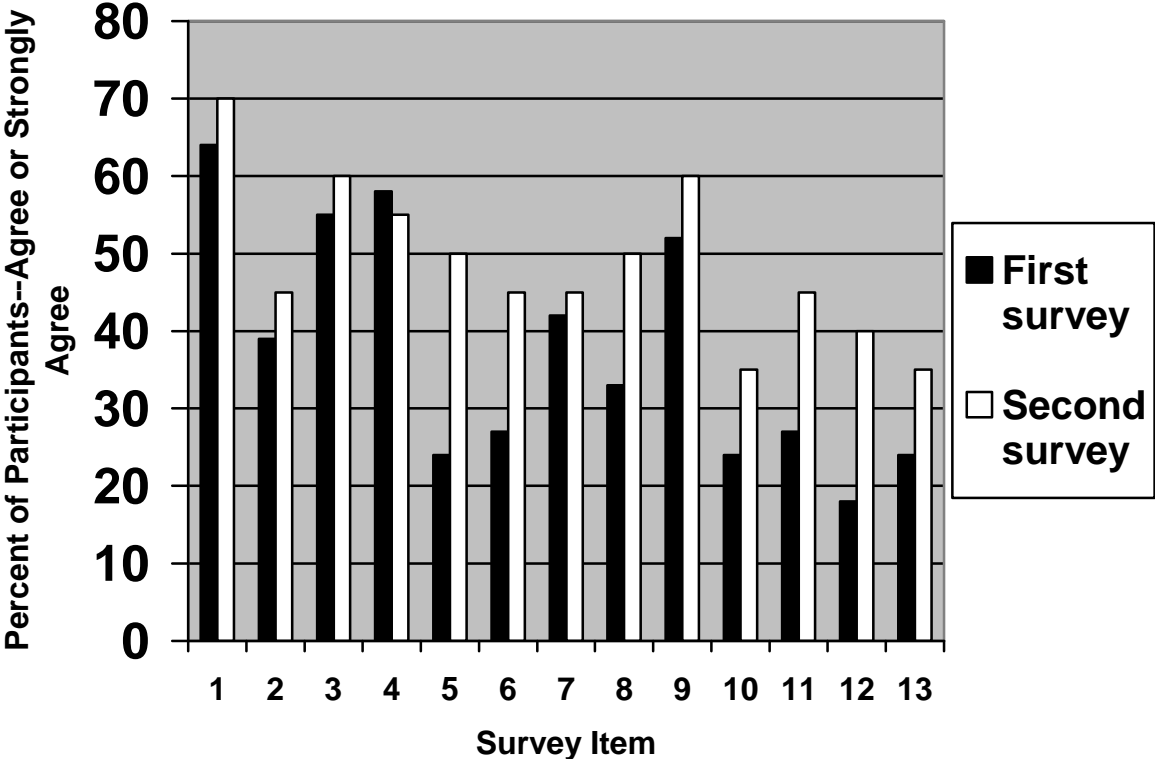
Figure 10. Comparison of agreement on first and second staff surveys. Percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each survey item on first and second staff survey is displayed. Survey items are presented in the order they appear in the survey. Complete survey is in Appendix A.
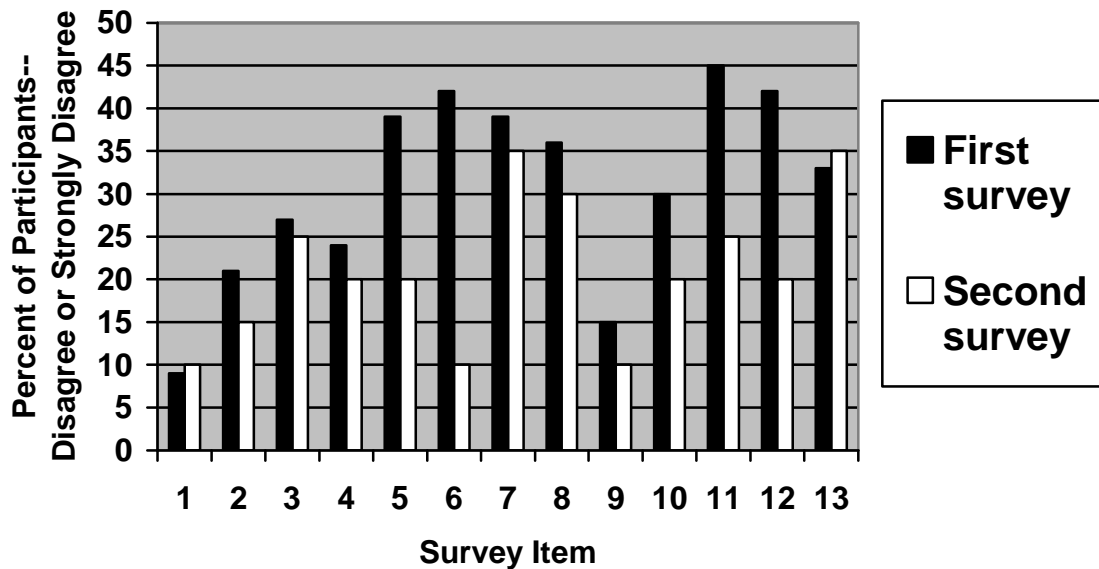
Figure 11. Comparison of disagreement on first and second staff surveys. Percent of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with each survey item on first and second staff survey is displayed. Survey items are presented in the order they appear in the survey. Complete survey is in Appendix A.

Survey items revealing both an increase in the percent of participants responding with agreement/strong agreement and a decrease in the percent of employees responding with disagreement/strong disagreement included the following:

- Item #2: My coworkers enjoy working here.

- Item #3: I feel valued as a person here.

- Item #5: I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work.

- Item #6: This is a fun place to work.

- Item #7: I have the opportunity to provide input about important decisions in my

  workplace.

- Item #8: All employees here are treated with dignity and respect.

- Item #9: I am satisfied with my job and my workplace.

- Item #10: My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace.

- Item #11: Creativity and fun are encouraged here.

- Item 12: I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.

Survey items with both the greatest increases in percent of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing and the greatest decreases in percent of respondents disagreeing/strongly disagreeing included the following:

- Item #5: I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work. (16% increase in agreement/strong agreement; 19% decrease in disagreement/strong disagreement)

- Item #6: This is a fun place to work. (18% increase in agreement/strong agreement; 32% decrease in disagreement/strong disagreement)

- Item #11: Creativity and fun are encouraged here. (18% increase in agreement/strong agreement; 20% decrease in disagreement/strong disagreement)

- Item #12: I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers. (22% increase in agreement/strong agreement; 22% decrease in disagreement/strong disagreement)

Alternate Hypothesis #4. The fourth alternate hypothesis states that a decrease in the number of Sparkling Springs staff member absences within a school year will exist following the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Comparison of absences using t-test for dependent samples.   Using data from the 18 survey respondents who included absences on both the first and second surveys, the researcher conducted a *t*-test for dependent samples to test the following hypotheses:

H_0: The number of staff absences will remain the same or increase following

intervention. $(\mu_D \geq 0)$

H_1: The number of staff absences will decrease following intervention. $(\mu_D < 0)$

Using $\alpha = .05$, the critical value of this right-tailed test was 1.740, and the test value was

-.161, indicating that there was not enough evidence to support the claim that absences

decreased following implementation of measures designed to improve staff morale.

Additional observations regarding staff absences. Absences varied greatly among staff

members and varied from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. In comparing

absences during the two school years, four individuals had the same number of absences each

school year, six individuals had more absences during the 2010-2011 school year, and eight

respondents had fewer absences during the 2010-2011 school year. These observations did

not suggest a consistent trend in the number of absences during the two school years

involved.

Analysis of Student Data

Alternate Hypothesis #5. Alternate hypothesis five states that an increase in the

percent of Sparkling Springs students in first through fifth grade reading at or above grade

level will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to

improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.

Comparison of DRA data using mean, median, and mode. The investigator

obtained end-of-the-year Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores for first through

fifth grade students at Sparkling Springs Elementary School for the 2009-2010 and 2010-

2011 school years. A total of 328 scores were available for the 2009-2010 school year, while

348 scores were available for the 2010-2011 school year. The investigator used all available

DRA scores to calculate the percent of students reading at or above grade level for each

grade (first through fifth). Table 6 presents the mean, median, and mode percent of students reading at or above grade level, using the data calculated for each grade level, for both school years.

Table 6

Percent of Students Reading At or Above Grade Level for 2009-2010 and 2010-2011

	2009-2010	2010-2011
Mean	68	65
Median	66	72
Mode	63	NA

Note: Numbers represent the mean, median, and mode percent based on DRA scores. The data represents 328 students total for the 2009-2010 school year (69 first graders, 63 second graders, 52 third graders, 67 fourth graders, and 77 fifth graders). The data represents 348 students total for the 2010-2011 school year (77 first graders, 67 second graders, 67 third graders, 67 fourth graders, and 70 fifth graders).

Comparison of DRA scores using t-test for dependent samples. From all available DRA scores, the researcher obtained a random sample of 30 students per grade level. Using benchmark DRA reading levels provided by the school's reading specialists, the researcher determined the percent of the sample of students at each grade level who were reading proficiently--at or above grade level--at the end of each school year. The investigator used a *t*-test for dependent samples to test the following hypotheses:

H_0: The percent of students reading at or above grade level will remain the same or

   decrease following intervention. ($\mu_D \leq 0$)

H_1: The percent of students reading at or above grade level will increase following

   intervention. ($\mu_D > 0$)

Using α = .05, the critical value of this left-tailed test was -2.132, and the test value was .310, revealing that there was not enough evidence to support the claim a that the percent of students reading at or above grade level increased following implementation of measures designed to improve staff morale.

Comparison of reading test scores using mean, median, and mode. As an additional test of the hypothesis related to reading achievement, the investigator obtained the final three reading unit test scores of the 2010-2011 school year, covering the five month period of this study, for students in grades one through five. Usable scores were available for 258 students. The researcher considered data usable if scores were present for all three of the unit tests and if scores were recorded as percentages. Table 7 compares the mean, median, and mode of unit test scores for each of the reading unit tests during the period of this study.

Table 7

Mean, Median, and Mode of Reading Unit Test Scores

	Unit A	Unit B	Unit C
Mean	72	78	74
Median	74	79	76
Mode	79	83	87

Note: Numbers represent mean, median, and mode for reading unit test scores. Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number. Data represents 258 students (18 first graders, 63 second graders, 64 third graders, 66 fourth graders, and 47 fifth graders).

Comparison of reading test scores using analysis of variance.   From all available reading unit test scores, the researcher obtained a random sample of 30 students—six per grade level. The investigator completed an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if

there was a difference in the means of the unit test scores. The researcher tested the

following hypotheses:

H_0: $\mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$: There is no difference in mean scores.

H_1: At least one mean is different from the others.

 With an α of .05, the *F* critical value was 3.101, while the test value was 2.700,

indicating that there was not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and the test did

not support the claim that there was a difference in the mean of reading unit test scores

during the period of this study.

Additional observations related to student reading achievement. Research question

four asks how efforts to improve staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School

affected reading achievement of students at the school. By comparing the percent of students

in grades one through five reading at or above grade level using scores from the DRA from

2009-2010 and 2010-2011, it is clear that while some grade levels experienced an increase in

the percent of student reading at or above grade level, others experienced a decrease. Figure

12 compares the percent of first through fifth grade students reading at or above grade level

in each grade level for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years.
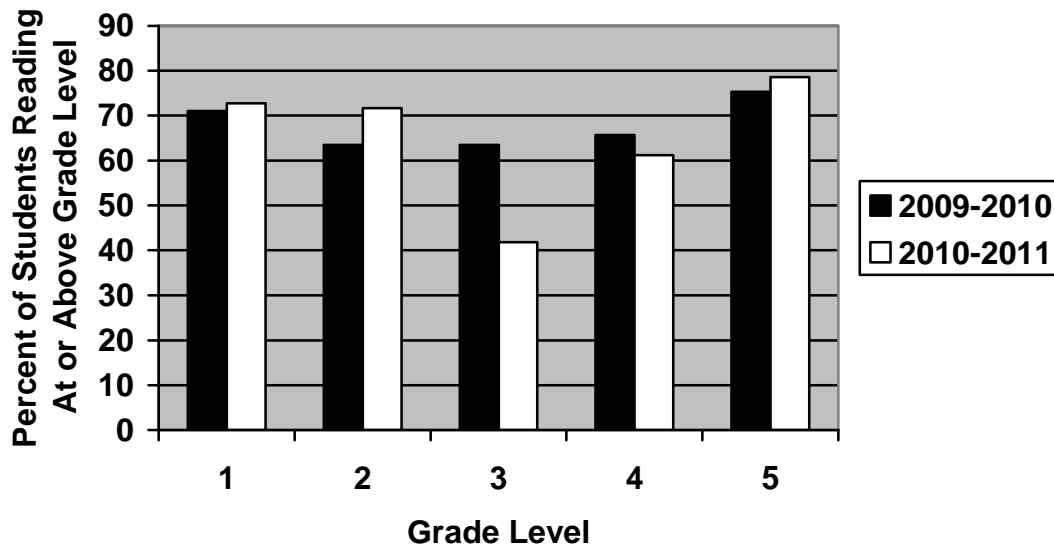
Figure 12. Comparison of student reading proficiency in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Percent of students in each grade level, one through five, reading at or above grade level, using 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores is displayed.

Alternate Hypothesis #6.   The sixth alternate hypothesis states that a decrease in the number of behavior referrals for Sparkling Springs students in kindergarten through fifth grade will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.   Teachers and other staff members at the school document severe or repeated behavior concerns through the use of office referrals. The school routinely compiles information on behavior referrals at each grade level for each school year.

Comparison of office referrals using t-test for dependent samples. The investigator obtained the total number of office referrals per grade level for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. Conducting a right-tailed *t*-test for dependent samples, the researcher tested the following hypotheses:

H_0: The number of student behavior referrals will remain the same or increase

following intervention.   ($\mu_D \geq 0$)

H_1: The number of student behavior referrals will decrease following intervention.

($\mu_D < 0$)

Using $\alpha = .05$, the critical value of the test was 2.015, and the test value was 4.460, demonstrating that there was enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis and to support the claim that behavior referrals decreased following implementation of measures designed to improve staff morale.

Additional observations related to student behavior. Research question four also asks how efforts to improve staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School influenced behavior of students at the school. A comparison of behavior referral numbers for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years showed that every grade level experienced a decrease in the total number of office referrals. During this time, total school enrollment remained approximately 400 students. Figure 13 compares the total number of office referrals per grade level for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years.
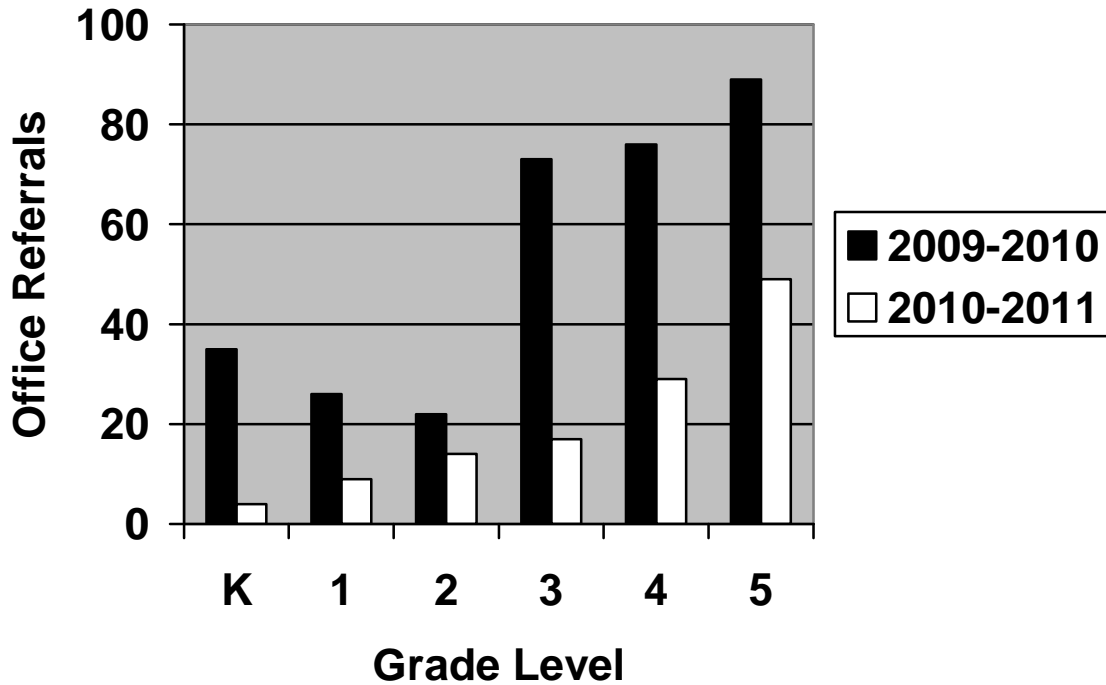
Figure 13. Comparison of 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 office referrals. This display shows the total number of office referrals for each grade level, kindergarten through fifth grade, for the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years.

Observations from Parent Surveys

The parent surveys in this investigation address the fifth research question, which asks the following: How does the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve staff morale affect parent perception of Sparkling Springs staff morale?

While only a small number of parents completed the parent surveys (first survey— seven parents; second survey—five parents), their responses and comments still provided some insight into their perceptions of staff member satisfaction and actions. Table 8 displays their responses to survey items.

Table 8

Percentage Agreement or Strong Agreement with Parent Survey Items

Survey Item	First Survey	Second Survey
Teachers and other staff members enjoy their jobs.	86	60
Teachers and other staff members are satisfied with their jobs.	71	60
I hear positive comments about (the school) from teachers and other staff members.	71	100
Teachers and other staff members have fun at work.	72	60
Teachers and other staff members treat parents well.	100	80
Teachers and other staff members treat students well.	100	100
Teachers and other staff members treat each other well.	57	80

Note. Numbers displayed represent the percent of respondents indicating agreement or strong agreement in response to each survey item.

No participants indicated strong disagreement with any survey items on either the

first or the second survey. One respondent disagreed with the statement "I hear positive

comments about (the school) from teachers and other staff members" on the first survey, and

no participants disagreed with any items on the second survey. While the data showed some

fluctuations in levels of agreement with the survey items, the responses suggested that, both

at the time of the first survey and at the time of the second survey, the majority of parents

completing a survey agreed that staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School

enjoyed their jobs; were satisfied with their work; spoke positively about the school; had fun at work; and treated students, parents, and each other well.

In response to the second survey item that asked parents to indicate if they believed that staff members were as satisfied, more satisfied, or less satisfied than they were earlier in the school year, 80% of respondents indicated that staff members were as satisfied, while 20% indicated that staff members seemed less satisfied. The single respondent who perceived a decrease in staff satisfaction commented, "I think this change has come due to the end of the school year approaching.   I think the teachers and students are tired."

Parent comments, both from the first and second surveys, indicated positive perceptions related to staff members' satisfaction and enjoyment of their work. Some comments included the following:

- "I would think the teachers and other staff is satisfied with their jobs. The reason I say this is because (Sparkling Springs) is a good school and my children seem to like and enjoy attending…"
- "Nothing but smiles from the staff."
- "…when I'm at the school the teachers are always in a good mood."
- "…fun and laughter are a part of…making a good environment."
- "I've never heard anything negative or degrading…from staff …"
- "…I personally have enjoyed it (work) with them…laughing and joking and watching the children enjoy what is put into school by the staff."
- "I hardly ever encounter anyone having a 'bad day'."
- "Everyone I have ever worked with seems happy."

Some parent comments also addressed the way that staff members treat students,

parents, and other staff members. With the exception of one comment on the first survey,

suggesting a need for interpersonal communication training for the office staff to improve

their interactions with parents, the rest of the parent comments regarding treatment of others

were positive. The following are some examples:

- "I am a parent and treated well."

- "During certain conversations with my children's teacher and they refer to
  another teacher, it is always pleasent [*sic*]."

- "The staff is always smiling. They talk in the hallways. Display a strong
  sense of teamwork."

- "No problems with the staff. Have two kids at the school, teachers are great."

- "The staff displays a strong sense of commitment to the students and parents."

- "…the students (my kids) appear to be happy with the educational system."

- "I have never heard any teacher speak negatively about another. The staff
  seems to get along and stick together."

- "Anytime I have came up to the school I have always been treated nice. Even
  if I run into a teacher in the store. The attitude is still very welcoming."

- "My kids love coming to school. They wouldn't if they weren't treated well."

- "Everyone seems to function good together."

Both the survey item responses and the parent comments suggested that, while there

did not seem to be a significant change in parent perception of staff member satisfaction and

behavior, the parent perceptions of these areas were overwhelmingly positive at the time of

each survey.

Summary

In order to investigate staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School, the investigator gathered survey data from staff members and invited staff members to participate in focus groups. The researcher designed interventions to improve staff morale based on staff member suggestions generated at the focus groups. Additional sources of data included parent surveys as well as student reading and behavior data.

Through survey completion and focus group participation, staff members offered insight into their own morale, their perceptions regarding the morale of their coworkers, and factors that they believed influenced morale. Participants also offered many suggestions for improving staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

Data analysis revealed that staff survey responses—both agreement/strong agreement and disagreement/strong disagreement—were dependent on job type and on years of experience in education, both for the first and second surveys. In addition, agreement/strong agreement responses increased following intervention, while disagreement/strong disagreement responses decreased following intervention. Student behavior referrals decreased following implementation of measures designed to improve staff morale as well. There was not adequate support from the data to suggest that staff member absences decreased following intervention, nor to suggest that student reading achievement increased following intervention.

Parents also had the opportunity to make observations about staff morale. Data from parent surveys did not reveal significant changes in parent perceptions of staff morale during the period of the study, but most responses to survey items and comments that parents provided were positive and complimentary of the staff both in the first and second surveys.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Discussion

Individuals spend a significant portion of their lives working. The way that employees feel about their workplaces and their jobs matters and has implications not only for each individual but for the success of the workplace as well. In education, this means that the ways that teachers and other staff members feel about work can affect student success. Finding out how staff members feel about their jobs and workplaces and seeking to improve employee morale may benefit schools.

This research investigated staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The investigation examined how efforts to improve staff morale influenced staff members, students, and parents. Using an initial staff survey and focus group, the investigator obtained information on staff members' feelings and attitudes related to the workplace prior to intervention. Four additional focus groups involved soliciting ideas from staff members, in categories based on research in the area of workplace morale, for improving staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The investigator implemented ideas staff members generated at the focus groups as the intervention portion of this study. A second staff survey and a final focus group following intervention provided the investigator with insights into changes that occurred in staff members' feelings and attitudes related to the workplace. Two parent surveys, pre and post intervention, presented information on parent perceptions of staff attitudes and actions. Student data on reading achievement and behavior pre and post intervention supplied information on the impact that staff morale changes had on students.

Findings and Implications

The investigator found that in both the first staff survey and in the second staff survey, differences existed in responses to survey items that were dependent on job type and

on years of experience in education. Statistical analysis of staff survey data using the chi-square test for independence supported both of the following hypotheses:

- Alternate Hypothesis #1. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of classroom teachers, certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

- Alternate Hypothesis #2. A difference exists in the job satisfaction and morale ratings of Sparkling Springs staff members with one to five years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with six to 10 years of experience in education, Sparkling Springs staff members with 11-15 years of experience in education, and Sparkling Springs staff members with 16 or more years of experience in education.

The fact that survey response differences existed based on both job type and years of experience in education suggests that employees with different types of jobs and with different amounts of experience may have different needs related to morale. In any organization, many different types of jobs exist. Even within the same organization, each position may have its own unique work setting, job expectations, schedules, peers or team members, and supervisory practices. Within an organization, individuals represent a wide range of work experience as well. Employees who have been working in a school setting for many years may have different attitudes about education, comfort levels with their jobs, and networks of support within and outside of their workplaces than individuals who have little or no experience in a school setting. These differences suggest then, that employees with different job types and with different amounts of experience may have different needs. Since every individual within the school setting is important and plays a role in student, school, and

district success—or lack of success—then assessing and addressing the needs of all individuals, regardless of job type or years of experience, is worthwhile and necessary.

The investigator also found support from the data for alternate hypothesis #3: An increase in Sparkling Springs staff member morale, as measured by the survey, will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures designed to improve Sparkling Springs staff member morale. Staff survey data showed both an increase in agree/strongly agree responses and a decrease in disagree/strongly disagree responses. This suggests that the intervention—implementing ideas suggested by staff members in an attempt to increase morale—did have some impact on staff morale.

Student behavior data supported alternate hypothesis #6:   A decrease in the number of behavior referrals for Sparkling Springs students in kindergarten through fifth grade will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale.   Every grade level in the school showed a decrease in the total number of behavior referrals when comparing the school year of this intervention with the school year before intervention. Many factors can affect student behavior and staff member use of office referrals. School-wide behavior expectations, academic expectations and support, class size, interactions of student personalities, and teacher experience are some factors that may affect behavior. During the 2010-2011 school year, seven Sparkling Springs Elementary School teachers from kindergarten through third grade participated in a research study that involved training and coaching in behavior management practices. This, too, could have had an impact on student behavior. While the investigation of morale did not seek to establish a causal relationship or correlation between staff member morale and student behavior, it did seek to study how staff morale may have affected student behavior,

and the data showed that following measures designed to improve morale, student behavior

referrals decreased. This suggests that making an effort to address staff member attitudes

and satisfaction in the workplace may have a relationship with positive student behavior.

However, data analysis did not support the claim in alternate hypothesis #4: A

decrease in the number of Sparkling Springs staff member absences within a school year will

exist following the implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated measures to improve

Sparkling Springs staff morale. Employees miss work for many reasons—personal illness or

injury, a family members' illness or injury, death of a family member or friend,

appointments, vacations, and simply the choice to take off a day. Some of these reasons,

such as the illness, injury, or death of a family member, can occur unexpectedly and can

require the use of many consecutive days. Individuals who have young children or who are

caring for elderly parents may be more likely to miss work for family-related reasons than

those who are not responsible for the care of other family members. The lack of support for

the claim of alternate hypothesis #4 does not mean, then, that morale does not have an impact

on staff member absences, but does suggest a need to further investigate reasons for absences

in relation to staff morale.

Student reading data did not support the claim of alternate hypothesis #5: An

increase in the percent of Sparkling Springs students in first through fifth grade reading at or

above grade level will occur following implementation of Sparkling Springs staff-generated

measures to improve Sparkling Springs staff morale. Student reading achievement did not

follow a consistent trend in this investigation; however, the time span of the study was

relatively brief. Continuing to track student reading data over time may be beneficial in

determining if interventions designed to improve staff morale have any impact on student achievement.

Recommendations for Sparkling Springs Elementary School

Based on this research, the investigator recommends the following for Sparkling Springs Elementary School:

Continue to regularly assess and address staff morale. Whether by using the same survey tool that this investigation employed or through another means, assessing and addressing staff morale on an ongoing basis will help to ensure that the school continues to make progress in the area of staff morale. While staff survey data showed improvements in staff attitudes and feelings about the workplace in many areas, a need still exists for additional growth. For example, by the time of the second survey, 60% of respondents indicated that they felt valued as a person in the workplace. This represents a small increase, from 55% at the time of the first survey, but still points to the necessity for work in this area. Similarly, 45% of second survey participants indicated that "this is a fun place to work," representing an increase from 27% of respondents at the time of the first survey, yet indicating that fun in the workplace is still an area of concern.   Ideally, the goal for agreement or strong agreement with survey statements should be 100%, since having all staff members agree with the statements would suggest a high level of staff member satisfaction and workplace morale. Table 9 shows the percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement at the time of the second survey, highlighting the need to continue to address and assess staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School.

Table 9

Percentage Agreement or Strong Agreement with Second Staff Survey Items

Survey Item	Agreement or Strong Agreement
I enjoy going to work each day.	70
My coworkers enjoy working here.	45
I feel valued as a person here.	60
My ideas and suggestions are valued at work.	55
I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work.	50
This is a fun place to work.	45
I have the opportunity to provide input about important decisions in my workplace.	45
All employees here are treated with dignity and respect.	50
I am satisfied with my job and my workplace.	60
My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace.	35
Creativity and fun are encouraged here.	45
I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.	40
Employees here receive praise and encouragement.	35

Note: Numbers represent the percent of second survey respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each survey statement.

With second survey agreement/strong agreement percents ranging from 35 to 70, Sparkling Springs Elementary School still has important work to do in the area of staff morale by regularly assessing and continuing to address staff morale.

Continue to implement staff-generated ideas for improving morale. The intervention portion of this investigation centered around soliciting staff input on ways to

improve staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. Within the research-based categories of treating employees well, including staff members in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding employees, and adding fun to the workplace, staff members made numerous suggestions, some of which the investigator implemented as part of this investigation. Continuing to ask staff members how they believe staff morale can be improved, and then implementing their suggestions, seems to hold potential for continuing the positive changes in staff morale that began during the period of this study.

Find ways to hear all staff voices.   While classroom teachers, certified non-classroom teachers, and classified staff members participated in survey completion, no classified staff members participated in focus groups for this study, even though the researcher invited all staff members. Since the study results suggested that differences exist in the morale of staff members with different job types, finding additional ways to solicit input from staff members in each job category is essential. This may involve adjusting schedules, providing time during the workday for staff members to participate in providing input, and asking staff members how they prefer to provide input.

Find ways to meet different staff needs. This investigation showed that differences exist in the morale of staff members with different job types and with different amounts of experience. Meeting with staff members in each job-type and years-of-experience category may be a beneficial way to learn about their specific morale concerns and needs in order to adequately address the differences that exist.

Continue to track student achievement data. During the time span of this investigation, student behavior referrals decreased, but student reading achievement did not show any consistent trends. Continuing to track both student behavior referrals to see if the

numbers continue to decrease and student reading data to see if any trends emerge over time would be beneficial in understanding the long-term implications for students of addressing staff morale concerns in the school.

Implications for Other School Settings

The purpose of this investigation was to address the issue of staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. Some of the lessons learned in this research may have applications to other school settings.

Ask staff members about their morale. Before beginning this investigation, the researcher believed that staff morale in the research setting was an area of concern; the process of asking staff members about their morale provided support for this belief. The staff surveys and focus groups were key in providing specific information on staff attitudes and beliefs related to overall satisfaction, treatment of employees, inclusion of staff members in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding employees, and making work fun. The information that staff members provided enabled the researcher to track changes and to implement effective interventions. In any school setting, asking staff members to provide input about their own morale and about their perceptions related to workplace morale is the necessary first step in addressing morale. Schools may choose to use surveys, focus groups, interviews, or other means to assess morale, but asking staff members about their morale in some way is essential if a school wishes to work toward improving morale.

Ask staff members for suggestions on ways to improve morale. In addition to the fact that asking staff members for suggestions is one way of including staff members in decision-making, it is also one way to ensure that the interventions are likely to bring about improvements in morale. Recurrent themes from the literature—treating employees well,

including staff members in decision-making, recognizing and rewarding employees, and making work fun—can provide a framework, but asking staff members in any given setting for their input will help to generate suggestions that will be beneficial in that specific setting. Every workplace is unique, so specific ideas that work in one setting may or may not yield the same results in another setting. Asking the individuals who work in a given school for their input is a way to generate ideas that are likely to provide positive results.

Recommendations for Future Research

This investigation addressed morale in one elementary school. Expanding the research setting to include additional elementary schools as well as middle and high schools, both within the same district and in other districts is one area for future research related to staff morale in schools. Expanding the research setting would allow for the investigation of the trends observed in this study. For example, do staff members with different job types and with different years of experience show differences in survey responses in other schools, as they did at Sparkling Springs Elementary School? Do students in other schools show a decrease in the number of office referrals following implementation of staff-generated suggestions for improving staff morale?   In addition, including additional schools would allow for comparisons of data from schools at different levels and in different locations to investigate questions such as the following: How is staff morale different in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools, and how are students at each of these levels affected by changes in staff morale? How is staff morale different in urban, suburban, and rural settings, and how are students in each of these settings affected by changes in staff morale?

Another area for future investigation is adding a study of administrators within each school setting. Through observation of administrators and by asking staff members about the actions and attitudes of school administrators, the investigation could attempt to identify how administrator characteristics and actions impact staff morale.

Summary

This investigation studied the impact of implementing staff-generated suggestions for improving staff morale at Sparkling Springs Elementary School. The findings of the study suggest that continuing to assess and address staff morale and continuing to implement staff suggestions for improving morale may continue to benefit the school. Finding ways to include all staff members and to address different staff member needs related to morale may be important for future improvements in staff morale. In addition, tracking student data may help to determine long-term effects of staff morale in the areas of student behavior and student reading achievement. While this action research study addressed morale in one specific school, other schools may benefit from assessing staff morale and by asking their own staff members for suggestions to improve staff morale.

Future research in the area of staff morale in schools may involve including additional schools within the same school district and in other districts. The research setting may also expand to include other elementary, middle, and high schools. Administrator characteristics and their impact on staff morale may also be areas for future investigation.

Appendix A
Staff morale survey   #_____

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Please indicate the type of job that you currently have:

_____ Certified position
___classroom teacher
___ other certified position (special areas, reading
specialists, any certified non-
classroom teaching positions)
_____Classified position (secretaries, teacher clerks,
building aides, custodians, cafeteria workers)

Please indicate the total number of years that you have worked in a school (in any location and in any type of position) _____ years

Please indicate the number of days you were absent during the past full school year (include sick and option days; do not count school business days) _____ days

Read each statement and indicate your level of agreement by placing an X in the appropriate box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I enjoy going to work each day.					
My coworkers enjoy working here.					
I feel valued as a person here.					
My ideas and suggestions are valued at work.					
I am recognized and rewarded for my achievements at work.					
This is a fun place to work.					
I have the opportunity to provide input about important decisions in my workplace.					
All employees here are treated with dignity and respect.					
I am satisfied with my job and my workplace.					
My coworkers are satisfied with their jobs and with our workplace.					
Creativity and fun are encouraged here.					
I hear positive comments about our workplace from my coworkers.					
Employees here receive praise and encouragement.					

On the next page, please list and/or describe the things that you like and suggestions that you have about your current job and workplace. Feel free to attach additional paper or to type your responses and attach the printed page.

Things I like about my current job/workplace

Suggestions I have for my workplace

Appendix B

Parent Survey 1   #_____

Read each statement and indicate your level of agreement by placing an X in the appropriate box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members at (school) enjoy their jobs.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members at (school) are satisfied with their jobs.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I hear positive comments about (school) from teachers and other staff members.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members have fun at work.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members treat parents well.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members treat students well.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members treat each other well.					

Please explain your answer:

Appendix C

Parent Survey 2   #_____

Read each statement and indicate your level of agreement by placing an X in the appropriate box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members at (school) enjoy their jobs.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members at (school) are satisfied with their jobs.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I hear positive comments about (school) from teachers and other staff members.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members have fun at work.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members treat parents well.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members treat students well.					

Please explain your answer:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers and other staff members treat each other well.					

Please explain your answer:

Please read each statement below and place an X in front of the statement below that you believe is true.

_____ Teachers and other staff members at (school) seem as satisfied and happy as they were earlier in this school year.

_____ Teachers and other staff members at (school) seem more satisfied and happier than they were earlier in this school year.

_____Teachers and other staff members at (school) seem less satisfied and not as happy as they were earlier in this school year.

Please explain your answer choice. (If you noticed a change in satisfaction and happiness of teachers, what have you observed that makes you think there has been a change? Why do you think this change has happened?)

Appendix D

Focus group 1—Current morale at our school
Questions to guide discussion

- Describe your own morale related to work at this time.
- Describe the overall morale level of staff members at our school.
- What do you hear staff members saying that relates to how they feel about working here at Sparkling Springs?
- Do you believe that students are affected by the morale level of the staff? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you believe that parents are affected by the morale level of the staff? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What factors do you believe affect the morale of Sparkling Springs staff members?

Focus group 2—Treating employees well
Questions to guide discussion

- Do you believe that you, as a staff member at Sparkling Springs, are treated with respect and dignity in the workplace? Explain.
- From the business world, Bill Fromm, provides suggestions on running a business successfully, and he suggests that managers need to show their employees that they are actually more important than the customer and will not tolerate their employees being treated poorly. Another author, Kroth, suggests that employers treat their employees like gold, or better yet, like human beings. What are your thoughts about this?
- What can we do at Sparkling Springs to let every staff member feel important and valued? If there is cost associated with these suggestions, how can we obtain funding?
- Several authors suggest acknowledging birthdays and work anniversaries, providing business cards for all employees, and other small gestures to let individuals know that they matter, not just as employees, but as people. What are your thoughts about these ideas?

Focus group 3—Including staff members in decision-making
Questions to guide discussion

- Have you observed any changes in staff morale at Sparkling Springs since implementation of ideas generated at our previous focus group? Explain or provide examples.
- How do you currently participate in decision-making at Sparkling Springs?
- When you have an idea that you believe would benefit our school as a whole, how can you currently a way share that idea so that it will be considered for implementation?
- Haasen and Shea suggest that employees should have the freedom and autonomy to make all job-related decisions. Do you feel that you have this type of freedom and autonomy? Explain.
- What are some systems or procedures that we could put in place to encourage staff members to develop and share ideas to be considered for implementation?
- Some organizations reward individuals for ideas that benefit the organization. How could we implement a program like this at Sparkling Springs?

Focus group 4—Recognizing and rewarding staff members
Questions to guide discussion

- Have you observed any changes in staff morale at Sparkling Springs since implementation of ideas generated at our previous focus group? Explain or provide examples.
- When you put forth effort above and beyond your basic job description or accomplish something significant, how are you recognized or rewarded for your accomplishment? Explain or give an example.
- What are some types of accomplishments or efforts that we want to recognize here at Sparkling Springs? Describe how we could identify specific criteria for recognition/rewards.
- What are some free or low-cost ways that we can reward staff members for their accomplishments? For rewards that have a cost, what are some sources of funding?

Focus group 5—Adding fun to the workplace
Questions to guide discussion

- Have you observed any changes in staff morale at Sparkling Springs since implementation of ideas generated at our previous focus group? Explain or provide examples.
- Several authors suggest that employees having fun in the workplace is the most significant indicator of effective, successful organizations, and that fun significantly increases productivity. What are your thoughts on this?
- Do you believe that Sparkling Springs is a fun place to work? Why or why not?
- What are some free or low-cost ways that we could add fun to the workplace?
- If money is required, what are some potential sources of funding?
- Several authors also suggest that humor decreases stress. How can we include humor at Sparkling Springs?

Focus group 6—Revisiting morale at Sparkling Springs
Questions to guide discussion

- Have you observed any changes in staff morale at Sparkling Springs since implementation of ideas generated at our previous focus group? Explain or provide examples.
- Describe your own morale at this time.
- Describe the overall morale level of staff members at our school.
- What do you hear staff members saying that relates to how they feel about working here at Sparkling Springs?
- Do you believe that the efforts that we have made this year to improve staff morale have had any impact on the morale of Sparkling Springs staff members? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you believe that the efforts that we have made this year to improve staff morale have had any impact on the students at Sparkling Springs? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Do you believe that the efforts that we have made this year to improve staff morale have had any impact on the parents of Sparkling Springs students? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What should be our next step(s) in addressing morale at Sparkling Springs?

Appendix E

Lindenwood University

School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities
Investigating Staff Morale in an Elementary School Setting

Principal Investigator ___Bethany Pendino___
Telephone: (314) 953-4400 x. 84412   E-mail: BJP559@lindenwood.edu

Participant (please print name)_____
Contact info _____

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Bethany Pendino under the guidance of Dr. Terry Stewart. The purpose of this research is to study current staff morale at our school, to find out what factors affect staff morale at our school, to examine how staff morale affects our students, and to try to improve staff morale.

Your participation will involve participating in a focus group. This focus group will last approximately 55 minutes.

Approximately 50 staff members will be invited to be involved in this research.

Your participation in this study may benefit you by providing you with the opportunity to provide input that may lead to positive changes and enhanced staff morale at (school). Your participation may contribute to the knowledge about morale in the school setting and may help our school and society.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and you may choose not to participate in the discussion of any topics that you do not wish to discuss. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

Since you will know the other individuals participating in this focus group, this investigation cannot guarantee that your participation in the focus group will be anonymous. However, I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. I will audio record the focus group, and I will be the only person with access to this recording. I will transcribe the discussion and will remove all identifying information in order to protect your privacy. When sharing ideas generated during this group with other staff members, I will not use any participant names or identifying information. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in my possession in a safe location.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Bethany Pendino (314-953-4400 x.84412) or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Terry Stewart, (636-949-4656). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date   Participant's Printed Name

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date   Investigator Printed Name

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Vitae

Bethany Pendino attended Truman State University and received a Bachelor of Science degree in communication disorders. She then completed a Master of Arts degree in speech-language pathology and audiology at the University of Iowa. While at the University of Iowa, Bethany participated in extensive clinical and leadership training, provided evaluations and therapy for children and adults in both school and hospital settings, and served as a teaching and research assistant.

Following graduation, Bethany worked for Special School District of St. Louis County, teaching students in a multi-level self-contained language classroom and providing itinerant and homebound speech-language services. During this time, she received certification in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. She currently teaches kindergarten in an elementary school in a large suburban school district.

Bethany serves as a team leader for her kindergarten team. She has been a mentor for several teachers new to the district. Bethany has presented professional development on instructional strategies to other kindergarten teachers in her district and has been involved in district curriculum revision. In addition, she is involved with district presentations for parents of incoming kindergartners. During the 2010-2011 school year, Bethany was her school's Teacher of the Year and a runner-up for district Teacher of the Year.