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1989

# The importance of school climate to an administrator

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## Abstract

Researchers throughout the country have been writing about school climate quite frequently over the past ten years. A great emphasis has been placed on the importance of school climate for making schools effective. Gottfredson and Hol llfield, (1988) believe school climate, like the climate of any other organization, determines whether the school can achieve excellence or will flounder ineffectively. A school with high levels of disorder, low morale, and poor cooperation between teachers and administrators cannot be a good place to learn or teach. And such a school is bound to have a poor public image.

The Importance of School Climate to an Administrator

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

————————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

————————

by

Steven Dwight Schulz

December 1989

This Research Paper By:  Steven Dwight Schulz

Entitled:  The Importance of School Climate to an
Administrator

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement
for thje Degree of Master of Arts (or Master of Arts in
Education).

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Researchers throughout the country have been
writing about school climate quite frequently over
the past ten years. A great emphasis has been
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making schools effective. Gottfredson and
Hollifield, (1988) believe school climate, like
the climate of any other organization, determines
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flounder ineffectively. A school with high levels
of disorder, low morale, and poor cooperation
between teachers and administrators cannot be a
good place to learn or teach. And such a school
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Positive school climate is defined as the
foundation for effective learning and it is
achieved through the cooperation of teachers,
administrators, support staff members, parents,
and the community (Gunning, Heinz, Rhoads, &
Watkins, 1988). It seems that creating a positive
climate in schools should be a primary goal of
school administration (Ambrosie and Haley, 1988).

A positive school climate begins at the
literal foundation of the school and encompasses
the physical surroundings in a school such as the
buildings and grounds, the safety of the
environment, the space and structure of the
typical instructional area (its lighting,
temperature, and cleanliness), and the population
of the school. The physical environment of a
school determines what kind of pride students,
parents, and staff members will take in the
school. The environment of a school and its
classes have a dramatic effect on the satisfaction
and success of its student body. In schools with
a quality school environment, people exhibit a
sense of pride, ownership, and personal
productivity that comes from helping to make the
school a better place. (Keefe, Kelley, and
Miller,1985). Brodinsky (1984) found that
classroom environment and teacher morale were
enhanced if adequate materials, supplies and
physical setting were available.

Kalls, (1980) found that school climate is
closely associated with teacher morale. Teachers

did not work just for the money, they also sought
personal satisfaction in belonging to a group and
adhering to standards and expectations set down by
their schools. Meaningful involvement in
decision-making gave teachers ample motivation
towards reaching goals that they themselves helped
in setting. Ambrosie and Haley, (1988) found that
teacher involvement in the decision making process
was important. The decision making process in the
areas of positive school climate, the planning
process, defining curricula monitoring student
progress, providing staff development for staff
effectiveness, parent and community involvement,
opportunities for student responsibility, and
establishing order and discipline was far too
complex a process to legislate in a generalized
legal document. Teachers work in an environment
suffused with bureaucracy. Rules made by others
govern their behavior. Ambrosie and Haley,
(1988), found that teachers were treated as if
they had no expertise. Curriculum supervisors,
teacher training experts, outside consultants and
authors of teacher guides define how a teacher was

to teach. Decision making appears to be the key factor in the wave of national studies dedicated to teaching and the teacher as the one important element in a successful plan to reform American education.

Research on decision making does depict positive differences in a number of factors such as worker attitudes, loyalty, motivation, and work habits, all of which might be assumed to contribute to the establishment of a healthy, positive organizational climate. One could make the connective argument that participation in decision making in schools contributes to the establishment of a highly successful climate, which in turn has a positive impact on a school's effectiveness (Ambrosie and Haley, 1988).

Brodinsky, (1984) indicates that teachers need to interact in critical issues in the school. This gave teachers a role in making decisions that affect them. Teacher morale can be generated by positive feedback from administrators on a job well done. Recognition of efforts and accomplishments give the teacher added

reinforcement in a sometimes unrewarding
occupation. Communications networks allow
teachers to interact with administrators and
teachers alike to voice their concerns about the
school. Teacher morale will be boosted by
ensuring that students and parents have a clear
understanding of behavior guidelines (Brodinsky,
1984).

Goodlad, (1983) discovered a significant part
of the climate puzzle in the area of methodology.
Lecturing, monitoring seat work, questioning and
testing still prevail in most schools in the
country. Modern day teachers were asked to do
many things that their teachers were not asked to
do if school climate was to improve. Teachers
were now confronted with the need to involve
students in a variety of ways of thinking, to
introduce students to concepts and not just facts.
Teachers were to provide situations that provoke
curiosity, to develop personal work standards and
ensure satisfaction in meeting them. Teachers
were asked to develop in students an appreciation
of others through cooperative endeavors, and to be

concerned about school and personal events.
Teachers were asked to make schools a fun,
meaningful place that provided a good sound
background of knowledge.

Keefe,(1985) found that personalization was
the key to making schools exciting and productive.
He found that personalized education was a
systematic effort to take into consideration the
individual characteristics of each student.
Keefe, (1985) discovered that advisement programs
in school would make students feel more important
in the overall spectrum of their schools, thus
school climate was naturally improved as a kind of
a run-off from students feeling better about
themselves and their school experience.  Keefe,
(1985) found that teachers must get involved in
all walks of student life.  Teachers would provide
career information, registering and placement
information, testing, counseling, and referral.
If schools were to become more personalized and
effective, the teacher as adviser was the critical
variable.  Teachers in the "Teacher Advisor" role
knew their advisees as friends.  As the advisement

relationship was strengthened over the years,
advisers were able to help students make better
decisions about school program , career and
college choices, and ordinary school adjustment.
The relationship between teachers and students
became a highly supportive and mutually satisfying
one.  School climate improved and student and
teacher performance was enhanced.

Schools with a positive school climate were
found to have a leader with a strong sense of
mission, a strong personal style, and an
understanding of the internal politics of his/her
organization.  Teachers were treated as
professionals and there was a strong sense of
autonomy.  Students were important and
expectations were high.  Clear codes of behavior
were enforced and everyone knew exactly what was
expected  (Levine, 1985).

It was imperative that a principal develop
and live by a philosophy of education.  This
philosophy should reflect the principal's personal
leadership style and be consistent with his/her
beliefs about education.  A sound educational

philosophy guided behaviors, attitudes, and action in schools. Principals who failed to establish a philosophy seemed to have no guidelines to lead the school in climate development or improvement. Lack of a clear vision seemed to undermine where the school was headed and the ability of the principal to function as a leader in the area of school climate (Kelly, 1980; Krajewski et al. 1983).

Using a principal's philosophy was a starting point, but goals for school climate must be developed. Every effort should be made to reach a consensus on the climate goals for the school (Lipham, 1981; Krajewski et al. 1983). Consensus was of vital importance so that the staff becomes involved and a strong sense of commitment was reached. Strategies to employ leadership goals should include: stating outcomes and expected behavior of teachers to achieve intended outcomes, analyzing to determine teacher understanding, agree with and determine that outcomes were achievable; provide reinforcement to teachers; supervising and providing feedback from teachers

and students in order to assess progress and
development (Kelly, 1980).

Establishing a successful leadership style
was essential to the overall performance of the
group. It was essential that the principal have
personal interactions with the staff, students,
and faculty. It was this interaction which
produced the desired end result of positive school
climate. Schools with a positive school climate
have principals who are positive, cheerful,
friendly, encouraging, and accessible to faculty,
staff, teachers, students, and parents.
Principals must also be fair, and honest with the
individuals they deal with (Miller, 1981;
Iannoccone & Jacgochian, 1985).

Rogers, (1984) found that humility and a
sense of humor as personal attributes that will
contribute to the success of a principal. Also,
Gottfredson and Hollifield, (1988) found that many
researchers frequently talk about school climate,
but have provided little help for the principal
who needs sensitive measures of school climate to
diagnose problems, and monitor progress in

overcoming them. Researchers at John Hopkins
University developed an <u>Effective School Battery</u>
to meet schools needs for objective measures of
school climate.

This instrument produces climate profiles to
diagnose problems, suggest improvement ideas, and
monitor progress. The profiles tell how safe a
school is, whether students and teachers find the
school a pleasant place to be, and whether there
is tension between administrators and teachers.
In all, the Effective School Battery describes the
school in terms of 34 specific aspects of school
climate and teacher and student characteristics.
No administrator should devote student and faculty
time to school climate assessment unless he/she
plans to use the results. The Effective School
Battery is used to diagnose school climate
problems.

By using the Effective School Battery,
principals will be able to gain valuable knowledge
about the climate in their school. This knowledge
should provide the principal direction in
developing or improving an existing school

Improvement plan. It was Important that the principal take this information and allowed the staff to take some ownership in the new school climate plan. If teachers, students, and administrators would join forces and get involved in a school Improvement, a plan would be much easier to implement, and a much more effective plan (Gottfredson and Hollifield, 1988).

Schools found to have a positive school climate had presented each Individual within the school an opportunity to make some impact on its total operation. Through Involvement and participation in Its operation, staff developed a sense of ownership In the school and will no longer feel confined to the four walls of the classroom. By fostering Interaction between faculty and administration, the staff was motivated to form similar ties between themselves and other staff members and students (Albrecht, 1981).

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