

HOW SCHOOL LEADERS SHAPE SCHOOL CULTURE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify how school leaders shape school culture and specifically what behaviors contribute to a positive school culture. The central question framing this study was: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture? I conducted a multiple case study at two central Pennsylvania public middle schools, referred to by the pseudonyms of Montem Middle School and Silvan Middle School. These schools were identified by the 2018 Niche report as having a positive school culture, which was affirmed through the district's own survey data. Through purposeful sampling, I identified school leaders to respond to interview questions. In addition to interviews, I gathered public artifacts displayed throughout the schools and on the schools' websites and observed faculty/committee meetings and classroom and hallway interactions. Using case study methodology, I analyzed the data and developed a detailed description of each case. From these descriptions, I identified key themes for understanding the complexity of school culture and the leadership behaviors that contribute to a positive school culture for each school (within-case analysis) followed by a comparison of the school cultures (cross-case analysis). The themes included expectations and values, vision and foundations of culture/climate, listening and problem-solving, relationships and building leaders, and appreciation. The findings of this study confirmed the significant influence that school leaders have on school culture, emphasized that a variety of stakeholders fulfill the roles of school leaders in formal and informal ways, and provided specific behaviors of school leaders that positively influence a school's culture.

*Keywords:* school culture, school leaders, leadership, teacher leaders, organizational culture, school climate

### **Dedication**

This manuscript is dedicated to my sweet son, who inspires me every day to be the best person I can be and to provide the best quality of life that I can for us. I love you, Aaron! It is also dedicated to my parents, sister, and grandparents, who support and stand by me in all that I choose to do. I am blessed beyond measure and grateful to have wonderful family and friends helping me and cheering for me along the way.

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All praise, honor, and glory to the God who sustains me and gives me strength! I pray that I may use the skills gained through this process to serve others.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Montem Middle School (MMS)

Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)

Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO)

Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Respect Organization Attitude Responsibility (ROAR at Silvan Middle School)

Responsibility Organization Attitude Respect (ROAR at Montem Middle School)

School Climate Student Questionnaire (SCSQ)

School-wide Interventions and Supports (SWIS)

School-wide Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

Silvan Middle School (SMS)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

School culture is a complex and dynamic aspect of the school experience and can be difficult to describe. Moreover, school culture has a profound effect on the entire school community, including employees, students, and parents. When a school culture is positive, the school community reaps the benefits; however, when a school culture is negative, the impact is palpable. A review of the literature demonstrated that school culture is a topic of great interest as researchers strive to define and measure its impact on school effectiveness and student achievement (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Rai & Prakash, 2014). While there are several quantitative case studies which address school culture, there is a lack of qualitative research that provides deeper understanding of this phenomenon (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Inandi & Gilic, 2016; Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, & Byrd, 2016; Roby, 2011; Turan & Bektas, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify specific behaviors of school leaders that positively influence school culture.

In this chapter, the researcher set forth the background of the study in order to provide historical, social, and theoretical context for the study. In addition, the researcher addressed the problem, purpose, theory, and questions guiding this research. The researcher explained the significance of the study, both to the researcher and to scholarly literature. Finally, the researcher included a list of terms and definitions to aid in the understanding of the literature and research.

### **Background**

School culture is the set of beliefs and values which provide a foundation for everything that takes place in a school (Fullan, 2007), and these beliefs, values, and traditions make each

school unique (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). Based on a review of the literature, school culture continues to be a topic of interest as it can positively or negatively impact school effectiveness and student achievement (Rai & Prakash, 2014). In a meta-analysis conducted by Cogaltay and Karadag (2016), the researchers concluded that “a positive climate in the school, improves teachers’ performance, supports their morale, and provides improvement on student achievement” (p. 625). Because the culture of a school is such a significant factor in school effectiveness and student achievement, research continues in order to determine which factors and behaviors create a positive school culture.

Through primarily quantitative studies using survey data, researchers have identified characteristics or factors that contribute to a positive school culture. One factor that is prevalent throughout the literature is that school administrators can be effective in shaping the culture and climate of a school (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015). Another factor that influences school culture is organizational trust (Demir, 2015). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) stated that “trust matters most in situations of interdependence, where people must depend on one another to achieve desired outcomes” (p. 438). If school personnel are required to work together for the success of the students, then trust is an essential factor of school culture (Erdogan, 2016). Another factor contributing to school culture is communication (Sabanci, Sahin, Sonmez, & Yilmaz, 2016). Sabanci et al. (2016) identified a statistically significant correlation between organizational culture and interpersonal communication.

While there exist many quantitative studies that present statistical data regarding these factors, and many studies argue that effective administrative leadership contributes to a positive school culture, there is a lack of qualitative evidence that identifies specific behaviors that have a positive influence on school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Inandi &

Gilic, 2016; Ohlson et al., 2016; Roby, 2011). This qualitative multiple case study may contribute to the existing literature by attempting to identify specific leadership behaviors that contribute to a positive school culture.

### **Historical Context**

Historically, school culture has been difficult to define and is often used in conjunction with the terms school climate and school environment (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Some researchers have suggested that a school's climate or environment is one aspect of the multi-faceted culture of a school (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). School culture remains difficult to define because of its complexity and dynamic nature, and researchers define it in a variety of ways; however, informally, school culture is demonstrated by how a school functions (Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Muhammad, 2009; Shaw & Reyes, 1992). School culture is unique to each school; therefore, there is no single correct way to create a positive school culture (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Shaw and Reyes, 1992).

In the 1970s, through psychologists studying child development, school effectiveness, of which school culture plays an important part, began to emerge as a significant contributor to a student's success in school, regardless of external factors (Rutter & Maughan, 2002). Although Rutter and Maughan (2002) reported that these early findings were met with skepticism, continued study demonstrated that several aspects of school culture, such as the school environment and relationships with teachers, were connected to student achievement. After decades of study, Rutter and Maughan concluded that school leadership, including shared vision and rewarded efforts, and "ethos qualities" such as a good environment and well communicated, high expectations for all, had a discernible impact on student progress (Rutter & Maughan, 2002, p. 467).

School culture has been likened to corporate culture in both its importance to the effectiveness of an organization and the significant impact that a negative culture has on productivity (Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Johnson, Snyder, Anderson, & Johnson, 1996). The effectiveness and productivity of an organization parallels the academic achievement of students, the willingness of teachers to collaborate and grow, and the leadership and support of administrators in the learning process. Despite the recognition of the importance of school culture by researchers, little progress was made in identifying specific actions or behaviors that contributed to a positive school culture (Fullan, 2007; Rutter & Maughan, 2002).

### **Social Context**

School culture has a significant impact on the effectiveness of a school and can affect all school stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, superintendents, school boards of directors, and community members. A school's culture reflects the interdependence of its stakeholders; all must work together to meet the needs of every student, every day. A positive school culture indicates that the school's stakeholders are working together effectively, which results in greater school achievement. According to McKinney et al. (2015), "a positive and progressive school culture propagates morale, staff performance and student enrichment" (p. 155). A positive school culture can contribute positively to teacher efficacy, job satisfaction, and student achievement while a negative school culture can have the opposite effect (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; McKinney et al., 2015).

School culture can have a significant impact on teachers' job satisfaction and feelings toward their work (Demir, 2015). In addition, school culture can have a significant impact on students' achievement (Connolly, James, & Beales, 2011; Ohlson et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Whether referring to teachers implementing new ideas or students

learning new things, students and teachers are more likely to succeed in an environment that is safe and in which risk-taking is encouraged (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). For optimal performance from teachers and students, the school culture needs to reflect a supportive learning environment.

School culture can also contribute to a teacher's willingness to participate in decision-making and readiness for personal growth and organizational change. This is significant as organizational change is vital to the sustainability and effectiveness of an organization (Inandi & Gilic, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016).

### **Theoretical Context**

The leadership theory of Kouzes and Posner (2012) provided the theoretical context for this case study. Kouzes and Posner's leadership theory identifies five ways by which leaders can "mobilize others to want to make extraordinary things happen in organizations . . . [to] turn challenging opportunities into remarkable successes" (p. 2). These five practices include "Model the Way," "Inspire a Shared Vision," "Challenge the Process," "Enable Others to Act," and "Encourage the Heart" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29). These five practices are further divided into ten "commitments of exemplary leadership" that begin to identify how a leader can fulfill the five practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29). The practices and commitments identified by Kouzes and Posner, although intended for organizational culture in general, relate to each aspect of school culture and the characteristics of a positive school culture.

### **Situation to Self**

As a teacher for more than 15 years, I have experienced a variety of school cultures, both positive and negative. I have been fascinated by the complexity and fragility of school culture in addition to the resistance of school culture to change. Recently I became a coordinator in the

district where I am employed and obtained administrative certification; these experiences have added another layer to my perspective of school culture and the ways in which colleagues respond to teachers who assert themselves as leaders.

I have done a lot of personal reading on the subject of school culture and worked with colleagues and administrators to improve the culture in the school where I am employed. This invisible force has a significant impact on teacher morale, collaboration, and job satisfaction, which in turn impacts the learning environment for students. Therefore, I wished to conduct further research into the behaviors of school leaders, including administrators, teacher leaders, staff leaders, and parent leaders, that have a positive influence on school culture.

This research is based on an ontological perspective which recognizes that multiple realities exist, including my own (Creswell, 2013). I recognize that each individual's experience may vary, and individuals will assign meaning to these experiences in different ways (Yin, 2014). Therefore, in this study, I gathered data from multiple participants from a variety of stakeholder groups within the school community, including administrators, teachers, staff, and parents. I worked with these participants through interviews and observations to develop an understanding of their perspectives of each school's culture and leadership practices.

This research is also based on an epistemological perspective, which refers to the nature of how something comes to be known (Creswell, 2013). This study was conducted in the context of the participants' workplace. I recognized that the more time I spent with individuals in conversation and the more observations I conducted in the school setting, the better I was able to understand the participants' perspectives and experiences particular to these cases (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006).

The social constructivist paradigm applied to this study as participants created their own

meaning from both individual and group experiences. Social constructivism is grounded in the belief that people do not come to know things passively, but they actively assign meaning to experiences, often through social interactions and/or relating them to historic/cultural experiences (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2007). As the researcher, I interpreted the perspectives shared by the participants, and I found common threads by analyzing and comparing participants' experiences, both within-case and cross-case (Creswell, 2013).

### **Problem Statement**

Every school or organization has a culture unique to that school/organization (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014). School leadership influences school culture (Huguet, 2017; McKinney et al., 2015); school culture influences teacher morale; teacher morale influences student learning (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). School culture is a pervasive force that can significantly impact the overall effectiveness of a school. The problem is that school culture is difficult to influence and requires strong leadership over time to effect meaningful change (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

Leadership manifests itself in a variety of people and a variety of behaviors throughout the school. "Principals communicate core values in their everyday work. Teachers reinforce values in their actions and words. Parents bolster spirit when they visit school, participate in governance, and celebrate successes" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 30). In considering what makes a school effective, it is necessary to address the views of multiple stakeholders.

While current research addresses aspects of school culture through quantitative analysis (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Inandi & Gilic, 2016; Ohlson et al., 2016; Roby, 2011; Turan & Bektas, 2013), few studies delve into the how or why a culture is positive or effective (Sabanci et al.,

2016). This multiple case study seeks to explore how school leaders, including administrators, teachers, staff, and parent leaders, influence a positive school culture.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify behaviors of school leaders that promote a positive school culture at two public middle schools that were ranked in the top 10% of Pennsylvania middle schools (NICHE, 2018). Throughout this research, school culture was generally defined as the “underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges” (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28). Additionally, positive school culture was generally defined as a culture in which “there is a supportive environment, the level of autonomy is high, and sharing and collaboration are its basis” (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017, p. 312) in addition to a strong belief in the ability of all students to learn (Muhammad, 2009).

The theory guiding this study was Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) leadership theory as this theory connects to the influence of leadership on organizational culture. Kouzes and Posner’s leadership theory identifies five practices, which are further broken down into 10 commitments, that exemplify effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

### **Significance of the Study**

Through this qualitative multiple case study, I identified leadership behaviors that influence school culture. Case study was an appropriate way to study the phenomenon of school culture because of its complexity and social nature (Yin, 2014). This study hopefully contributed empirically, theoretically, and practically to those who desire to understand more about organizational culture and the leadership actions and behaviors that contribute to a positive culture.

**Empirical**

This qualitative multiple case study provided data regarding leadership behaviors that influence school culture. While some studies identify factors of school culture, such as administrative support, trust, and collaboration (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Demir, 2015), this study examined and identified the behaviors that contribute to these factors. This effort to discover how and why certain leadership behaviors positively influence school culture addressed a gap in the literature (Sabanci et al., 2016). Understanding how school leaders positively influence school culture may benefit the administrators, teachers, students, and parents who comprise the school community.

**Theoretical**

From the perspective of theoretical significance, this case study may extend the leadership theory developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012). Kouzes and Posner have identified five leadership practices that exemplify effective leadership, which include “Model the Way,” “Inspire a Shared Vision,” “Challenge the Process,” “Enable Others to Act,” and “Encourage the Heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29). Through interviewing a variety of stakeholders, conducting observations, and collecting artifacts, the researcher attempted to identify specific actions and behaviors that demonstrate Kouzes and Posner’s five practices as they relate to the field of education and to school culture in particular.

**Practical**

From a practical perspective, this case study attempted to move beyond simple identification of factors that influence school culture, such as leadership, trust, and communication, and to discover specific behaviors and actions of school leaders that promote a positive school culture. The outcomes of this study may provide resources and tools that could

be used by schools to improve their school culture, and consequently, teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Additionally, the information gained through this case study may provide the basis for identifying areas of need and creating professional development opportunities related to school culture and effective leadership.

### **Research Questions**

Through this study, I identified leadership behaviors that influence school culture. To that end, the following research questions guided this study:

#### **Central Question**

How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory provides the framework for this research question. Through this study, I attempted to identify specific actions related to Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leaders as they relate to establishing a positive school culture. Each of the five practices connects to the factors that define school culture and the characteristics of a positive school culture.

#### **Research Questions (RQ)**

**RQ 1:** What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?

Kouzes and Posner (2012) identify "modeling the way" as the first tenet of their theory, which requires that school leaders share the organization's values and serve as living examples of carrying out the organization's values. These behaviors contribute to the values and beliefs that build a school's culture over time.

**RQ 2:** What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?

The second tenet of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory, "inspire a shared vision," requires that leaders work with staff to develop a common vision for the organization

and motivate staff to embrace possibilities. In school culture, this reflects the need to focus on the work and innovation that needs to occur in order to promote student success.

**RQ 3:** What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?

This research question is guided by Kouzes and Posner's (2012) third principle, "challenge the process." This practice addresses the ways in which leaders invite others to make improvements and solve problems. This requires leaders to promote a school culture that is safe for taking risks and learning from mistakes in order to make continuous improvement in the ways that a school meets the needs of all students.

**RQ 4:** What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) fourth tenet, "enable others to act," asserts that effective leaders establish trust and build relationships in order to build capacity and competence among staff. By building capacity among teachers and staff, administrators are equipping other members of the school community to act in ways that contribute to carrying out the school's vision. This research question attempts to identify the specific behaviors that build capacity and the influence it has on school culture. In addition, this research question specifically relates to the autonomy and collaboration that characterize a positive school culture.

**RQ 5:** What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?

This research question is guided by Kouzes and Posner's (2012) fifth principle, "encourage the heart," which requires that leaders of an organization recognize and appreciate their staff in a personalized way in addition to celebrating the successes of the organization. This relates to the importance of sharing, collaboration, rituals, and traditions that define and exemplify a positive school culture.

## Definitions

The definitions included in the following section will contribute to the overall understanding of the discussion of school culture.

1. *Agency* – “Agency refers to acts done intentionally” (Bandura, 2001, p. 6). Bandura (2001) identifies three types of agency: personal, proxy, and collective. He suggests that some actions are done for personal benefit, while other actions are “achievable only through socially interdependent effort” (Bandura, 2001, p. 13).
2. *Build capacity* – To build capacity is to increase the ability of educators to grow in their instructional practice through the “development of knowledge, skills, and commitments” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, pp. 56–57).
3. *Collective agency* – Collective agency refers to “people’s shared belief in their collective power to produce desired results” (Bandura, 2001, p. 14).
4. *Distributed leadership* – Distributed leadership recognizes multiple leaders, which include formally and informally designated individuals within an organization. These leaders demonstrate shared leadership practices with a focus on the interactions of the leaders (Harris & Spillane, 2008).
5. *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)* – also referred to as Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) and School-wide Interventions and Supports (SWIS); PBIS is a framework or systems approach comprised of intervention practices and organizational systems for establishing the social culture, learning and teaching environment, and individual behavior supports needed to achieve academic and social success for all students (PBIS, 2017).

6. *Positive (or strong) school culture* – A positive school culture is a culture in which “there is a strong supportive environment, the level of autonomy is high, and sharing and collaboration are its basis” (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017, p. 312). In addition, a positive school culture is one in which “educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others” (Muhammad, 2009, p. 20).
7. *Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)* – “An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016, p. 10).
8. *School climate* – School climate reflects four areas of the school experience, including safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and school environment (Kohl, Recchia, & Steffgen, 2013).
9. *School culture* – School culture is the “underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges” (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28). These beliefs, values, and traditions distinguish one school from another (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016).
10. *School effectiveness* – School effectiveness refers to the level at which schools “produce the intended results” or achieve the desired outcomes (Rai & Prakash, 2014, p. 42).
11. *School leader* – School leader in this context refers to anyone within the school community who takes a leadership role such as “planning and implementing program development, making appropriate resource allocation, [and] improving the performance

of staff and students by motivating and guiding them” (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016, p. 605). This can include an administrator, teacher, staff member, parent, or student.

12. *Teacher collaboration* – “Teacher collaboration examines the extent to which teachers engage in constructive dialogue and conversations that further the educational mission, vision and goals of the school” (Ohlson et al., 2016, p. 121).

13. *Teacher leader* – A teacher leader is a teacher who is involved in the school beyond his or her classroom; teacher leaders performs additional roles/duties that exceed the expectations of their job descriptions (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Demir, 2015).

### **Summary**

Every organization has its own culture, and schools are no exception. A school’s culture can have significant impacts throughout the organization, including teacher effectiveness and student achievement. While researchers would agree that there is no “one size fits all” approach to establishing a positive school culture, it stands to reason that certain leadership characteristics, and the behaviors that support those characteristics, would be prevalent in schools with a positive school culture. Although several quantitative studies have been conducted on this topic, there is a lack of qualitative research to examine the specific behaviors of school leaders that influence school culture. Through this multiple case study, I worked to identify those leadership behaviors and to provide a depth of understanding that is lacking in the current literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify leadership behaviors that contribute to a positive school culture. In this chapter, I provide the theoretical framework that guided this study and situate the study within scholarly literature. In the theoretical framework, I connected school culture to Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory. Following the theoretical framework, I synthesized the literature related to school culture and addressed the gap in the literature. This literature review includes research that provides descriptions of school culture, the significance of principals' influence on school culture, and the factors that contribute to school culture. In addition, the research addresses the importance of teachers, staff, and teacher/staff leadership in creating a positive school culture, the influence of parents, the impact of school culture on student achievement, and the impact of school culture on school effectiveness. Finally, this literature review demonstrates the interconnectedness of the factors contributing to school culture and the direct and indirect influences of these factors on student achievement that exist as a result. While there is an abundance of quantitative literature and survey data regarding school culture, there is a lack of qualitative research aimed at identifying specific behaviors of school leaders which positively impact school culture, especially at the middle school level.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Kouzes and Posner (*Leadership Challenge*, 2000–2017) have spent decades researching leadership and leadership behaviors. From their research, Kouzes and Posner have developed the leadership theory that provided the framework for this multiple case study. In its fifth edition, the leadership theory developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) identified five practices of

effective leadership that allow leaders to inspire, empower, and encourage others to achieve greater organizational outcomes. The authors further identified ten behaviors, two for each of the five practices, that explain ways to accomplish the five practices. Kouzes and Posner published the first edition of their leadership model in 1996 and have continued to refine and develop what they have identified as essential leadership practices (*Leadership Challenge*, 2000–2017). While Kouzes and Posner have not focused on the field of education specifically, their model is applicable to schools (Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh, & Omary, 2009; Kouzes & Posner, 2016; Turan & Bektas, 2013), and the authors have identified educators as leaders and role models for staff and students (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). The five practices of exceptional leaders that provide the theoretical framework for this multiple case study include: “Model the Way,” “Inspire a Shared Vision,” “Challenge the Process,” “Enable Others to Act,” and “Encourage the Heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) designated “Model the Way” as the first practice of effective leaders as their philosophy asserts that behavior is a stronger indicator of a leader’s effectiveness than personality. Kouzes and Posner asserted that leaders must commit to clarifying and affirming organizational shared values and then setting the example through actions that demonstrate the shared values (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Modeling the way requires leaders to make known the mission, values, and goals of an organization, and once clearly defined for employees/staff, leaders must demonstrate the mission, values, and goals of the organization through their own actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Kouzes and Posner stated that a leader’s actions are constantly scrutinized; employees/staff will be watching for leaders to live the mission, values, and goals of the organization to build their credibility (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This is especially true in schools, where administrators have been identified as a significant

influence on and agents of change for the school's culture (Lee & Li, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) identified "Inspire a Shared Vision" as the second practice of effective leadership. In order to inspire a shared vision, leaders must "imagin[e] exciting and ennobling possibilities" and "enlist others in a common vision" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29). Inspiring a shared vision requires leaders to see the big picture in the midst of rapid change, to listen to their employees/staff, and to share the vision positively and meaningfully (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). In addition, leaders are required to empower others in developing the vision and promoting a sense of collective agency to carry out the vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). School leaders are continuously charged with improving opportunities for student learning (Abu-Tineh et al., 2009), and in order to ensure that faculty and staff share the vision and are willing to do the work that is required of them, administrators must foster communication, build teacher leadership, and provide support (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Beachum & Dentith, 2004).

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) third practice involves "Challenging the Process," a tenet which requires allowing for and encouraging innovation and risk-taking. Challenging the process requires a desire and willingness to improve, not to become complacent, and to learn from experience (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). In order for improvements to be made and changes to occur, employees/staff must be willing to share ideas and feel comfortable and safe enough to take risks (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). This is especially necessary yet challenging in schools, where teachers are often publicly scrutinized and professional evaluations are tied to student success (Aasebo, Midtsundstad, & Willbergh, 2017). In addition to creating an environment that is safe for sharing and exploring new ideas, it is

important to include teachers in decision-making processes (Inandi & Gilic, 2016). This demonstrates their value to the organization and as professionals.

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) fourth practice, "Enable Others to Act," focuses on the importance of collaboration, trust, and self-efficacy of employees/staff. This practice reflects the belief that leadership is built upon relationships, and a leader cannot successfully lead unless a foundation of trust has been firmly established (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2016). In addition, effective leadership is often reflected in a leader's ability to build other leaders. School administrators must build trust and confidence among teachers (Erdogan, 2016) so that they become contributors to the school learning community because teacher leadership has a positive impact on school culture and student achievement (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Demir, 2015). By prioritizing professional development and building competence and self-efficacy, teachers and staff will feel empowered to take on leadership roles within the school community (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) have identified "Encourage the Heart" as the fifth and final practice of effective leaders. Encouraging the heart addresses the need for meaningful appreciation and celebration of successes (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Celebrating success builds a "spirit of community" that fosters the relationships and collaboration which are necessary for developing and sustaining a more positive school culture (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29). In order for leaders to show appreciation in meaningful ways, Kouzes and Posner assert that it must be specific to an individual's performance (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Whether it is in expressions of gratitude or offerings of support, school leaders can positively influence teacher job satisfaction and effectiveness, which impact school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Lee & Li, 2015).

## **Related Literature**

In order to begin examining the practical behaviors of school leaders that influence school culture, it was necessary to situate this study in scholarly literature. A review of the literature indicated that defining school culture and climate is complex. There are many layers that contribute to school culture, including individuals' and communities' perspectives and experiences (Kohl et al., 2013) in addition to factors such as leadership, trust, and communication (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Demir, 2015; Sabanci et al., 2016). These factors are interconnected and combine to influence student achievement in direct and indirect ways and involve a variety of stakeholders. Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, and Malone (2006) stated that providing a positive school culture that supports student achievement requires "the principal, teachers, staff, and families to operate in concert" (p. 474).

It is also important to develop an understanding of the way school culture and climate have been measured in quantitative studies, the measurement scales used, and to explore the factors that have been identified as contributing to school culture. The impact of school culture is far-reaching. It can have a positive or negative effect on teacher and student experiences, and it can impact student achievement and overall school effectiveness. This impact of school culture on student achievement necessitates the continued study of the leadership behaviors of all stakeholders to identify specific strategies and behaviors that encourage the most positive results in building and maintaining a positive school culture.

### **Defining School Culture**

School culture is a complex phenomenon that has a significant impact on school effectiveness, both in regard to employee performance and student achievement (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Peterson & Deal, 1998). School culture has been defined in a variety of ways

and is sometimes confused with school climate and school environment. A school's culture is very simply and generally defined as "the way we do things around here" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 19; Peterson & Deal, 1998), and a school's climate or environment refers to "the way we feel around here" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 19). While school climate is one aspect of a school's culture, which focuses on school safety, relationships, and the physical environment (Kohl et al., 2013), there are many other factors that contribute to school culture, which can be comprehensively defined as the "underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 28). These norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals are created over time by the interactions of a variety of stakeholders throughout the community in which the school is situated. Administrators, teachers, staff, parents, students, superintendents, school boards of directors, and others who live in the community contribute their experiences to the overall school culture.

School culture has many layers and is different for every school (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Shaw & Reyes, 1992). Kohl et al. (2013) identified four layers of personal experience: the individual's perception of surroundings, the different settings in which an individual participates (e.g. home, school, community), the individual's relationships with others in these different settings, and finally the culture created by the interactions of the previous three levels. In other words, school culture reflects the experiences of its constituents, and these experiences encompass not only classroom experiences, but also experiences outside the classroom walls. A teacher's experience includes relationships with students and also with colleagues and administrators, collaboration or lack thereof with colleagues, the climate of faculty meetings, school initiatives, and parent and community interactions (Kohl et al., 2013). A student's school

experience includes peer relationships in addition to relationships with parents, teachers, and administrators; a student's experience reflects time spent in the classroom, school open spaces, such as the cafeteria and the library, and at school events in addition to his or her home life and community activities (Kohl et al., 2013). These experiences contribute to the overall ways in which stakeholders experience school culture.

### **Measuring School Culture**

In attempting to measure school culture and identify factors that contribute to a positive school culture, many scales have been developed and utilized in quantitative research. These scales are typically designed to measure students' and teachers' perceptions of school culture and climate and are generally based on self-reported feedback (Kohl et al., 2013). Kohl et al. (2013) conducted a literature search to examine school climate measurement scales and utilized 76 peer-reviewed studies from which they pulled the most commonly used scales. In their research, Kohl et al. discussed a variety of scales including the school connectedness scales, which measure the sense of connectedness or belonging that students feel. This aspect of school culture can impact student-to-student relationships, student-to-teacher relationships, and student achievement (Kohl et al., 2013).

Kohl et al. (2013) also discussed the use of the Effective School Battery scale, which includes subscales related specifically to school climate (Kohl et al., 2013). This scale measures aspects of the school such as safety, fairness, and consistency of behavioral consequences; these scales relate to the importance of communicating expectations and delivering consequences clearly and consistently for maintaining a positive school culture. Finally, Kohl et al. discussed school culture scales that measured aspects of school culture such as teacher effectiveness, student-to-teacher relationships, and teacher commitment; in addition, Kohl et al. reported that

researchers often adapt these verified scales to meet the needs of their own research to address certain issues (e.g., school violence; Kohl et al., 2013). While they did not report on the outcomes of each study, Kohl et al. concluded from their literature search that there are a significant number of reliable scales for measuring school climate and culture and suggested that researchers carefully consider their use or modification rather than creating new scales (Kohl et al., 2013).

Using the Leadership Practices Inventory and the School Culture Inventory to assess the relationship between leadership behaviors and school culture, Turan and Bektas (2013) conducted a study with 349 teachers among 15 primary schools in Turkey. The Leadership Practices Inventory addressed the administrative practices related to “guidance, creating a vision, questioning the process, and encouraging the staff and audience” (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p. 159). The School Culture Inventory addressed items such as “collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, and professional support” (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p. 159). The researchers reported a strong relationship between teachers’ view of school culture and leadership practices, and they asserted that principals are the “role models of the school culture” (Turan & Bektas, 2013, p. 162). The researchers also concluded that principals have the key role of helping to transform individual goals into a common vision with shared goals for school stakeholders (Turan & Bektas, 2013).

Aldridge and Fraser (2016), using a school environment scale, a teacher self-efficacy scale, and a teacher job satisfaction scale, explored school culture from the teacher perspective. The researchers surveyed a total of 781 teachers from 29 high schools in Australia (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). The findings of this study identified a significant relationship between aspects of school culture and teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Aldridge & Fraser,

2016). In addition, the researchers reported a strong correlation between principal support and teacher job satisfaction (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016).

Cansoy and Parlar (2017) used the teacher leadership scale and the school culture scale to examine the relationship between teacher leadership and school culture. The participants in this study included 366 high school teachers from Istanbul with an average of 6.62 years working in the teaching profession (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017). Their findings demonstrated a predictive relationship between teacher leadership and school culture; the more supportive and positive the culture, the more often teachers exhibited leadership behaviors.

Ohlson et al. (2016) conducted a school culture survey with a focus on six factors: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose, and learning partnership. The study included 1,657 participants from 50 schools in the state of Florida, with data collected electronically (Ohlson et al., 2016). The researchers tied these aspects of school culture to student behaviors, such as attendance and school suspensions, and reported a significant relationship between school culture factors and student outcomes (Ohlson et al., 2016).

Quantitative studies using a variety of measurement scales, whether standardized or adapted, offer great insight into the factors that contribute to school culture. Kohl et al. (2013) emphasized that it is critical to the use of these measurement scales to examine a “broad range of individual, community and even cultural factors . . . as school [culture] is not just made up of objective school characteristics” (p. 423). While these scales attempt to address the complexity of school culture and are able to identify relationships between certain factors of school culture, quantitative measurements are not enough to inform practices related to improving school

culture. Qualitative studies are needed to address school culture in greater detail and to discover specific leadership behaviors that help to create a positive school culture.

### **School Climate**

School climate, also referred to as the school environment, closely connects to school culture and can influence the quality of a school's culture. Climate affects culture in a variety of ways that ultimately impact the students' learning experiences. Kohler-Evans, Webster-Smith, and Albritton (2013) defined the importance of meaningful conversations and the impact that safe and open conversations can have when stakeholders are committed to doing what is best for students. Kohler-Evans et al. stated, "When the climate is sustained, it has a profound effect on the way that people think and behave, so much so that it eventually establishes a way of life, the way things are done, or the culture" (p. 22). If the climate is one in which people feel safe, welcomed, and valued, there will be a positive influence on the school's culture. If the climate is one in which people feel tension, disorganization, and a lack of physical or emotional safety, the school's culture will suffer. Of primary concern is that the school climate influences all areas of the school, including the classroom climate (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016).

In addition, the climate of a school can be influenced by the school's culture. Stover (2005), referencing data from the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) survey, discussed the impact of culture and climate on both staff and students. If attitudes and behaviors within the school reflect a negative school culture, the climate will suffer (Stover, 2005). On the other hand, a positive school culture, in which teachers feel empowered and students want to learn, will inspire a positive school climate (Stover, 2005).

School climate comprises several aspects of the school experience, including safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the school environment (Kohl et al., 2013). In a study

of principal and teacher leadership in the elementary school setting, Sebastian, Allensworth, and Huang (2016) used teacher and student survey data from four school years to examine the relationship between leadership and student achievement. Sebastian et al. recognized that while principals and teachers may directly and indirectly influence students' learning in a variety of ways, school climate, and specifically school safety, was one of the most significant factors in affecting student achievement.

Kaffemanienė, Masiliauskienė, Melienė, and Miltenienė (2017) conducted a quantitative study using a survey questionnaire to explore the concept and “essential components” (p. 64) of a high-quality educational environment. The sample for this study included 528 teachers, 1,025 parent/guardians, and 814 students, all from a variety of educational settings with various backgrounds. School safety continued to be a common theme, which was expressed particularly strongly from the parent and student perspective (Kaffemanienė et al., 2017; Sebastian et al., 2016). In addition, students expressed the importance of resources and motivation for learning, meeting the diverse needs of learners, and student voice (Kaffemanienė et al., 2017). Parents expressed a desire for consistency in implementation and accountability of behavioral expectations while maintaining some flexibility in dealing effectively with students (Kaffemanienė et al., 2017). Teachers demonstrated a greater focus on the learning structures of the school, interaction with students, and the impact on student achievement (Kaffemanienė et al., 2017). Kaffemanienė et al. suggested that the teacher/educator has the greatest influence on the educational environment.

### **Positive versus Negative School Culture**

School culture has a strong relationship to the effectiveness of a school for both teachers and students; a positive school culture can positively influence school effectiveness while a

negative school culture has the opposite effect (Teasley, 2017). In their study of the relationship between school culture and teacher leadership, Cansoy and Parlar (2017) described a positive school culture as one in which “there is a supportive environment, the level of autonomy is high, and sharing and collaboration are its basis” (p. 312). Cansoy and Parlar further asserted the importance of trust, personal relationships, sympathy, and collaborative problem-solving (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Parlar, Cansoy, & Cagatay-Kilinc, 2017). In addition, Muhammad (2009) added that teachers’ belief in students’ ability to achieve success was a significant factor in a positive school culture. In other words, a positive school culture exists when principals are supportive, teachers collaborate, and student success is the shared vision of all stakeholders.

On the other hand, a negative school culture can significantly contribute to the lack of school effectiveness. Rai and Prakash (2014) carried out a literature review based on the key factors of school effectiveness and reported that “the characteristics of ineffective schools (like lack of vision, unfocused leadership, dysfunctional staff relationship, ineffective classroom practices, etc.) were found extremely related to the culture” (p. 44). When a negative school culture exists, it serves as a roadblock to collaboration, job satisfaction, school connectedness, and ultimately to student achievement.

### **Factors of School Culture**

Researchers have identified many factors that contribute to school culture, including school leadership, trust, communication, collaboration, teacher self-efficacy, teacher job satisfaction, teacher leadership, teacher retention, staff and parent influence, student achievement, and school climate/environment (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Dahlkamp, Peters, & Schumacher, 2017; Daiktere, 2009; Demir, 2015; Frelin & Grannas, 2015; Lee & Li, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015; Sabanci et al., 2016). While this list may not be

exhaustive, it is representative of the myriad of factors that comprise a school's culture and contribute to overall school effectiveness.

School leadership has emerged as one of the most significant factors that impact school culture (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Huguet, 2017; McKinney et al., 2015; Rai & Prakash, 2014). School leadership can refer to anyone who exhibits leadership behavior in the school community, including administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students; however, the school principal/administrator has, up to this point, demonstrated the greatest influence, either directly or indirectly, on school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Lee & Li, 2015).

**Principals' impact on school culture.** The role of the school principal has emerged as one of the most significant influences on creating a positive school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Connolly et al., 2011; Lee & Li, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Sebastian et al., 2016). McKinney et al. (2015) conducted a study of approximately 500 teachers and counselors and approximately 20 principals in National Blue Ribbon Schools, and using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), sought to identify effective strategies implemented by school principals. In order to lead effectively and promote a positive school culture, a principal must embody the school's vision and goals in their actions, provide organizational and instructional leadership and support, establish a culture of trust and collaboration, enable others to lead, communicate effectively, and create a safe environment in which learning is the focus. In addition, McKinney et al. asserted that principals must strike a balance between promoting the work of the organization and developing relationships within the organization (McKinney et al., 2015). In other words, the people and the productivity must be cultivated and cared for in equal measure. Finally, a principal needs to understand the school's

culture and be able to perceive the changes within the school culture in order to continuously lead in a positive direction (McKinney et al., 2015).

Successful school administrators lead by example and demonstrate how to carry out the school's vision through their own actions (McKinney et al., 2015; Turan & Bektas, 2013). They create a culture of learning by positioning themselves as learners who sit side by side with teachers and participate in professional development opportunities (McKinney et al., 2015). Modeling the behavior that they expect from their subordinates has proven to be an effective tool for school principals. In addition, Sebastian et al. (2016) asserted that an essential function of a school principal is to establish a safe and positive learning environment; it is through this contribution to a positive school culture that school administrators most directly impact student achievement.

Researchers have identified administrative support as another influential factor related to positive school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Supportive principals significantly contribute to school culture in a variety of ways. Administrative support has the potential to impact teacher job satisfaction (and subsequently teacher retention), teachers' self-efficacy, and teachers' attitudes toward their work (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). In addition, principal support can influence the school's culture of trust both at personal and organizational levels (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Erdogan, 2016; Huguet, 2017).

**Distributed or shared leadership.** Another aspect of successful and effective administrative leadership is enabling others to lead (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; McKinney et al., 2015). Developing a culture of shared leadership benefits both administrators and

teachers/staff as administrators are relieved of some of their workload and teachers/staff feel a sense of value (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016).

Wan, Law, and Chan (2018) conducted a study for the purpose of examining teachers' perceptions of distributed leadership and the relationship between their perceptions and their role in the school. Wan et al. surveyed 155 teachers (this term encompasses school personnel at multiple levels including classroom teachers, content coordinators, and principals, who are primarily considered instructional leaders as well as school administrators/managers) from six primary schools in Hong Kong (Wan et al., 2018). Approximately 30% of the survey addressed school culture, teacher leadership, and principal leadership in equal parts. The concept of distributed leadership is defined by encouragement from school administrators for teachers to assume leadership roles, even when they are not formally designated as leaders, to improve school instruction and processes (Wan et al., 2018). The findings demonstrated that overall there was a positive perception of distributed leadership among the teachers surveyed; however, the majority of teachers felt a stronger connection to their team or department than to their school community as a whole.

Personnel perceptions also varied depending on the individual's role in the school. Those who had greater responsibilities beyond the classroom as part of their job description demonstrated a stronger enthusiasm for distributed leadership than colleagues who did not have responsibilities in addition to their teaching (Wan et al., 2018). When administrators treat their professional staff as professionals and allow committees of teachers and staff to do the work that needs to be done, the culture reflects the resultant feelings of trust and empowerment (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016).

**Establishing a culture of trust.** Trust exists for individual persons, the organization as a whole, and among colleagues; at each level, trust is a significant factor for school culture (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Demir, 2015; Erdogan, 2016; Huguet, 2017). Personal trust develops through interactions with others and relationships that develop over time (Erdogan, 2016). Erdogan (2016) developed two trust culture scales as part of a study to examine the impact of trust on a positive school culture. Erdogan surveyed 379 teachers in nine districts in Ankara and asserted that whether as a peer (colleague to colleague) or hierarchical (administrator to staff) relationship, “ensuring trust between two parties is a long-term interactive process that involves sharing information, opinions, and feelings” (Erdogan, 2016, p. 163). Building trust requires ongoing effort and is difficult to regain once damaged or lost.

At an organizational level, school administrators bear the responsibility of establishing organizational trust (Francis et al., 2016). One way in which administrators build organizational trust is through effective instructional leadership. Huguet (2017) conducted a literature review of studies that examine effective attributes of leadership on school effectiveness and reported that principals who provide instructional guidance and expertise gain the respect of and build community with teachers. When teachers feel that administrators have a classroom perspective and are partners in an effort to grow students, teachers are more likely to feel supported and trusting of leadership (Huguet, 2017).

Organizational trust also has a significant impact on developing teacher leadership (Demir, 2015). Demir (2015) used a causal-comparative design to study the effect of organizational trust on the teacher leadership culture of public primary schools in Burdur (Demir, 2015). Demir’s study had 378 participants across 21 different schools. Demir asserted that if a culture of trust is high within an organization, teachers are more likely to assert themselves as

leaders, to share their ideas and opinions, and to contribute to the development and promotion of the school's vision.

Also significant to establishing organizational trust is the fair treatment of faculty and staff by school administrators (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). Cogaltay and Karadag (2016) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the effects of leadership on a variety of organizational factors. The researchers asserted that when school employees feel that administrators handle situations consistently and fairly and are true to their word, there is a higher level of organizational trust (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). This holds true in working with parents and community members as well; administrators bear the responsibility of establishing trust with families and the community through consistency, care, and collaboration (Francis et al., 2016). Trust plays a significant part in many areas of school culture, and research has demonstrated a correlation between organizational trust and student achievement (Louis & Lee, 2016).

**Effective communication.** Communicating effectively, both orally and in writing, is a critical factor that influences school culture and is a significant expectation of the role of the school administrator. The effectiveness of communication permeates the school community and is reflected in the school culture. The way information is communicated at the organizational level trickles down to the way information is communicated in the classroom; the way adults model communication, the way students will learn to communicate (Aasebo et al., 2017).

Communication is necessary for sharing information, and even more important, for sharing the school's vision and for encouraging faculty and staff through praise and expressions of gratitude (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Effective communication is not just about what is communicated, but how and when it is communicated. It is necessary to consider whether information needs to be delivered in person or whether an email is sufficient. It is necessary to

consider whether a message should be communicated individually or to the whole group. It is necessary to know when information needs to be communicated urgently and when information should be withheld. Communication is also about listening and knowing how and when to respond. Sabanci et al. (2016) conducted a study specifically to address the issue of correlation between school culture and communication, and they found that there is a moderate correlation between school culture and communication. Sabanci et al. used survey data from the Interpersonal Communication Skills Questionnaire from 1,037 teachers and principals from kindergarten to high school in Antalya, Turkey. Based on their findings, the researchers recommended further qualitative research related to communication and school culture (Sabanci et al., 2016).

Daiktere (2009) conducted a study for the purpose of exploring communication to stakeholders as a reflection of principal leadership and school culture; this study was part of a larger study on school culture in Latvian general education schools. The researcher surveyed 357 principals in phase one of the study, and 152 teachers and 78 staff members in the second phase of the study (Daiktere, 2009). The results of the survey indicated that principals communicate with teachers and parents more frequently than other stakeholders, while students and the community received the second largest frequency of communication (Daiktere, 2009). Staff members received the least communication regarding school principles and processes than any other stakeholder group (Daiktere, 2009). The researcher discussed the importance of including all stakeholder groups in communication and suggested that including all stakeholders in communication may contribute to school improvement and a positive school culture (Daiktere, 2009).

**Teacher job satisfaction.** Research has shown that teacher job satisfaction is a significant factor in school culture and has a direct relationship to student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016). Teachers' job satisfaction influences their performance (Arifin, 2015; Sadeghi, Amani, & Mahmudi, 2013); the effects of job satisfaction can be seen in teachers' attitudes toward their work and students, in their willingness to pursue professional development, and in their commitment to remaining in their school and/or in the teaching profession (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016).

School culture has proven to be, at minimum, a supporting factor in teachers' job satisfaction (Arifin, 2015). Job satisfaction can be influenced by the physical environment of the school and the level of trust and respect for administrators, and job satisfaction is also considered a mediating factor between principals and student achievement (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). In addition to relationships with administrators, teacher self-efficacy, collective efficacy, the ability to build and maintain relationships with colleagues, and teacher voice in the decision-making process impact teacher job satisfaction (Caprara et al., 2006; You, Kim, & Lim, 2017). This demonstrates both the influence of a positive school culture on teacher job satisfaction and the influence of job satisfaction on school culture as teacher job satisfaction permeates several areas of the school community.

**Teacher self-efficacy and teacher effectiveness.** Teacher self-efficacy reflects a teacher's feelings of capability and confidence with regard to his or her ability to carry out duties both in the classroom and as a colleague. According to Caprara et al. (2006), teachers who possess a "strong sense of efficacy exhibit high levels of planning and organization, are open to new ideas and are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students" (p. 485). This high level of self-efficacy promotes a collaborative culture of teaching

and learning, which contributes to teacher effectiveness and the overall strength of a school's culture. Teacher self-efficacy is also closely connected to teacher job satisfaction because of the importance of self-confidence in carrying out responsibilities; for this reason, teacher self-efficacy is inextricably linked to student achievement (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Caprara et al., 2006).

Louis and Lee (2016) conducted a study that examined the effect of school culture on the adaptability of teachers; in other words, they wanted to determine what aspects of school culture improved teachers' attitudes toward organizational learning and willingness to improve their practice. The researchers surveyed 3,579 teachers across 117 schools in nine states in the United States (Louis & Lee, 2016). Louis and Lee concluded that a school culture that focuses on the importance of academic achievement and provides appropriate resources and opportunities for learning has a positive correlation with teacher effectiveness (Louis & Lee, 2016). In addition, Louis and Lee found that teachers at the elementary level have a greater capacity for organizational learning than teachers at the secondary level; they attributed this finding to the opportunity of elementary teachers to more naturally fit into small, collaborative groups (Louis & Lee, 2016). This study also concluded that aspects of school culture such as respect, trust, and collaboration contribute to teacher self-efficacy and effectiveness (Louis & Lee, 2016).

Teacher self-efficacy and effectiveness both contribute to school culture and are influenced by the school's culture. Teachers' self-efficacy and collective efficacy of school personnel can have a positive influence on school culture and build school morale (Caprara et al., 2006; Fullan, 2009). Reciprocally, a school's culture can influence teachers' self-efficacy through principal support and the level to which teachers are empowered within the school (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). Including teachers in the decision-making process contributes to

teachers' self-efficacy (You et al., 2017). In addition, teachers' self-efficacy and teachers' effectiveness can also be improved when teachers are provided the opportunity and encouragement to collaborate with others (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016).

**Teacher collaboration.** Collaboration has been identified as a significant factor in contributing to a positive school culture and as a foundation of school effectiveness (Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Huguet, 2017; Muhammad, 2009; Ohlson et al., 2016). While teachers historically have worked in isolation to disseminate content to students (Huguet, 2017), more recent trends in education have found benefit in the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs), which promote collaborative work and collaborative learning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016). Through PLCs, teachers are able to plan together, implement, review student work (data), reflect, and determine next steps (which may include re-teaching with input from colleagues or moving on to the next area of study). This collaboration provides significant value to teachers' practice and directly benefits the students whom they teach.

In addition to content-focused PLCs, teachers may find it useful to work in groups that are not necessarily focused on shared content but driven by a desire to improve classroom experiences (Sales, Miloner, & Amat, 2017). Teachers may be motivated to participate in such working groups because of dissatisfaction with classroom practice, a desire to implement new ideas, and a weariness of working in isolation (Sales et al., 2017). Teachers who voluntarily participate in such professional development may serve as natural leaders to the whole school community. It is important to a positive school culture to support these efforts toward continuous improvement and encourage the leadership that naturally evolves (Carpenter, 2015).

Teacher collaboration and PLCs provide teachers the opportunity to learn from each other, to learn together, and to grow and improve their craft (Muhammad, 2009). Teachers benefit from collaboration in increased feelings of self-efficacy, in a greater sense of belonging to the school community, in improved job satisfaction, and in a more positive school culture. This translates to a significant benefit to students in their learning and achievement (Ohlson et al., 2016).

**Teacher leadership.** Collaboration is not just effective among teachers, but a collaborative leadership model, in which teachers are empowered to assume leadership roles, has a positive impact on school culture as well (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The less hierarchical and the more collaborative the leadership structure, the more positive the school culture will be (Carpenter, 2015; Sadeghi et al., 2013). In addition, research has demonstrated that teacher leadership is a mediating factor between principal leadership and student success (Sebastian et al., 2016). Teacher leadership can be incredibly powerful: teachers who take on leadership roles can work with administrators to develop and promote the school's mission and vision, teacher leaders can influence organizational and instructional change, and teacher leaders can influence a school's culture (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Demir, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Parlar et al., 2017).

A school culture that fosters teacher leadership reflects aspects of a positive school culture such as collaboration and administrative support (Parlar et al., 2017). School administrators play a significant role in developing teacher leaders, and this administrative support builds organizational trust (Parlar et al., 2017). School administrators must recognize that the changing needs of schools require multiple sources of expertise and the development of a

leadership structure that allows for contributions from a variety of voices (Harris & Spillane, 2008). Carpenter (2015) suggested that training teacher leaders would serve as a way to promote a culture of shared leadership and provide teachers with the tools to lead effectively. Teacher leadership can also influence teacher job satisfaction and teacher self-efficacy. When teachers feel that they have a voice in decision-making processes, they feel valued and more confident and are more likely to contribute to the larger school community and remain committed to their work.

**Teacher retention.** Teacher retention and teachers remaining in the teaching profession can have a significant impact on school culture and school effectiveness. Dahlkamp et al. (2017) conducted a study regarding the impact of principal self-efficacy on school climate and teacher retention. The literature presented as part of their study demonstrated a strong link between principal self-efficacy and teacher retention. Their study, which included 11 participants from one school district in Texas, was limited in size and did not demonstrate any significant correlation between principal self-efficacy and teacher retention. However, the researchers attributed the results of their research to the limitations and encouraged further research using larger samples sizes.

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) utilized School and Staff Survey (SASS) data and Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) data to examine the impetus for teacher mobility and to determine whether or not teachers left the profession entirely or transferred to another school. This study included data from 3,505 participants (predominantly White females between the ages of 30–39) at one point in time and allowed for a nationally representative sample of data (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). The researcher wanted to examine the influence of school climate, including classroom autonomy, behavioral climate, and administrative support, on a teacher's decision to leave,

transfer schools, or stay in a teaching position (2009). Kukla-Acevedo argued that providing desirable workplace conditions is one factor that can be controlled administratively at the school level, as opposed to factors such as salary and benefits, which are typically controlled by central office administrators at a district level.

Kukla-Acevedo (2009) reported that novice teachers were more likely to leave the profession or switch schools than their more experienced counterparts. In addition, school climate was a statistically significant factor in teacher turnover; teachers who felt supported by their administrators were considerably more likely to remain in their current position. This is significant and warrants further research as a tool to retaining teachers and minimizing the impact of teacher turnover on student achievement. The researcher also reported that classroom autonomy did not indicate a statistically significant impact on teacher retention (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

**Staff and parent influence.** While not often considered to be as significant as the administrator or teacher role in influencing school culture, other school staff and parent involvement can contribute to a positive school culture (Frelin & Grannas, 2015; Svanbjornsdottir & Frimannsson, 2016). Involving all members of the school community builds trust, collaboration, and efficacy, which lead to a more positive school culture. Staff, including paraprofessionals and others who work at the school (such as secretaries, cafeteria workers, and custodial staff), interact directly and indirectly with students on a daily basis and influence their overall school experience (Daiktere, 2009; Frelin & Grannas, 2015). For this reason, it is important to include school staff in communications related to school practices and principles and to give staff a voice in contributing to the school vision and school improvement (Daiktere, 2009).

In addition to representing a significant stakeholder group, classroom paraprofessionals provide an additional adult presence in the classroom and allow for inclusion, which helps to build a culture of acceptance (Francis et al., 2016). Greater adult presence in the classroom also provides opportunity for differentiated instruction for meeting students' needs and providing collaborative support to classroom teachers (Francis et al., 2016). When staff are utilized effectively and their contributions to the school community are valued, there is a positive influence on school culture.

Parents also interact with students on a regular basis and can provide a level of engagement in school and involvement in students' lives that positively influences the culture of the school (Svanbjornsdottir & Frimannsson, 2016). While parent involvement and parent leadership look different in elementary than at the secondary level, parents play an important role in a school's culture and students' success. At the elementary level, parents can be involved in a variety of ways, such as the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), or parents can participate as classroom helpers. At the secondary level, it is a bit more challenging to involve parents in the daily life of the school; however, parent engagement is still a necessary piece of a student's success. When school personnel value parent input and respond with care to parent concerns, parents provide critical support to the learning process and positively contribute to the school culture (Francis et al., 2016).

**Superintendent and school board of directors.** Often overlooked as a factor in discussions of school culture are a school's superintendent and board of directors. This stakeholder group, while their presence may not be felt daily in a school building, has the ability to influence school culture through their leadership and support of school personnel (Sabanci et al., 2016; Stover, 2005; Webner, De Jong, Campoli, & Baron, 2017). Stover (2005) discussed

the importance of school culture as a predictor of student achievement and asserted that school boards must focus on initiatives that build culture and relationships in addition to training staff and developing curriculum (Stover, 2005). In addition, school boards and superintendents need to support positive school culture by ensuring effective leadership (i.e., hiring and supporting school principals who have the ability to influence a school's culture and nurture it to grow; Stover, 2005).

Webner et al. (2017) conducted research to examine the perceptions of school boards' presidents and superintendents on the characteristics of effective superintendents. Through a measurement scale, which was developed by the researchers, Webner et al. surveyed 101 superintendents and 35 school board presidents. One of the most common themes identified by the researchers indicated that school board presidents and superintendents believed strongly in the importance of "developing a culture and climate which enhances teacher morale and student achievement" (Webner et al., 2017, p. 815). In addition, the researchers concluded that school board presidents and superintendents believed that the effectiveness of a superintendent depended more on the development and cultivation of positive relationships than administrative qualities (Webner et al., 2017).

Finally, the public nature of board meetings, which involve the school board of directors and superintendent among other stakeholders, contributes to a community perception of a school's culture (Sabanci et al., 2016). School boards of directors and superintendents' attitudes, style of communication, and support of school personnel and initiatives unfold in a public forum and therefore contribute to school culture.

**Summary of the factors of school culture.** There are several factors that contribute to school culture, and several aspects of school culture that have been identified as indicative of a

positive school culture. The complexity of school culture lies within the multiple stakeholders who influence and are influenced by the school culture and the interconnectedness of the many factors that contribute to a school culture. With the involvement of so many stakeholders in creating a school's culture, it is difficult to pinpoint a single factor, recipe, or solution for developing and maintaining a positive school culture; however, leadership, particularly of school administrators, is most often discussed. Ultimately, it is the impact of school culture on student learning and achievement that makes the research of the attributes of a positive school culture a topic for continued study.

### **Student Achievement**

Several studies have reported a correlation between school culture and student achievement (Connolly et al., 2011; Dumay, 2009; Roby, 2011). Although some studies suggest that the influence of school culture is higher on schools with lower socioeconomic status than on schools with higher socioeconomic status, there is general agreement that school culture is a moderating factor related to student achievement (Dumay, 2009). Some researchers claim that socioeconomic status is not a mediating factor at all and argue that a school's climate and culture is a great predictor of student achievement (Stover, 2005). In a school where the desire to learn is high, relationships are respectful, students feel safe, and teachers feel empowered, student achievement trends higher (Stover, 2005). By addressing the attitudes and behaviors that represent a school's culture, administrators are able to most significantly impact positive change (Stover, 2005).

School environment is one area that significantly impacts student achievement. Students need to feel safe to learn, both physically and emotionally. Students need an environment that is orderly and free of threat (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2016) and an environment

where they feel emotionally safe to take risks in their learning (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). One way to encourage students to feel safe in their learning environment is to personalize their school experience (Rutledge & Cannata, 2016). By providing students the opportunity to interact with adults consistently, such as counselors or administrators looping with their students throughout their high school experience, students feel increasingly cared for and safe in their learning (Rutledge & Cannata, 2016).

Ali and Siddiqui (2016), using the School Climate Student Questionnaire (SCSQ), surveyed 1,500 students in the north, central, and south districts of Punjab province to examine the relationship between and the effects of the learning environment on student achievement. Their findings identified a positive correlation between school climate and student achievement and supported previous research that a positive school learning environment has a statistically significant influence on students' achievement. The aspects of the learning environment that most impacted students' achievement were the curriculum, group procedures, and relationships with teachers (Ali & Siddiqui, 2016).

Several researchers have indicated that teachers are a significant mediating factor in the way that school culture influences student achievement; specifically, in the areas of teacher job satisfaction (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016), teacher self-efficacy (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016), teacher collaboration (Ohlson et al., 2016), teacher leadership (Demir, 2015), and teacher retention (Dahlkamp et al., 2017), teachers' attitudes and behaviors can have a significant effect on the culture and climate of a school. This, in turn, has a strong connection to student achievement.

## **School Culture and School Effectiveness**

Research has demonstrated a significant connection between school culture and overall school effectiveness (Connolly et al., 2011). A positive school culture can serve to enhance school effectiveness whereas a negative school culture can provide substantial obstacles to achieving desired outcomes (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Ohlson et al., 2016; Rai & Prakash, 2014; Rutter & Maughan, 2002). According to Dogan (2017), the effectiveness of a school is most often measured by the school's ability to attain goals related to achievement scores; however, schools' effectiveness can also be measured by their responsiveness to students, parents, and the community, by student perception and satisfaction, and by the effectiveness and satisfaction of the teachers.

Teacher effectiveness, which contributes to overall school effectiveness and school culture, is comprised of several factors. Teacher collaboration is one aspect of school culture that has been shown to have a positive influence on school effectiveness (Tichnor-Wagner, Harrison, & Cohen-Vogel, 2016). Teacher collaboration contributes to a school culture that embraces learning and school improvement, which exerts a positive influence on student learning and school effectiveness. In addition, teacher retention has the potential to influence school effectiveness and student achievement; as teachers remain in their positions, gain experience, and develop professionally, there is the potential for greater effectiveness than with repetitive hiring of novice teachers (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Kershner and McQuillan (2016) conducted a multiple case study to examine leadership and its effect on change; school culture represented one aspect of their study. The researchers conducted observations and interviews of principals, teachers, parents, and students over a three-year period and reported that effective leadership, which they emphasized as distributed

leadership, from all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, staff, and others, improves student performance (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016). In addition, the school culture must be developed in such a way that it is adaptive to change; the current reality of the field of education is that there is the continuous need for educators to examine and improve their practice based on the available research (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016).

Negis-Isik and Gürsel (2013), on the other hand, conducted an ethnographic case study of a single school to assess the correlation between school culture and school effectiveness utilizing unstructured observation and semi-structured interviews. The researchers found no connection between the school's culture and the school's effectiveness. Their results indicated that school effectiveness as defined by student achievement rested on the characteristics of students alone and that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to be successful (Negis-Isik & Gürsel, 2013). These results are contradictory to several other studies and to the belief that all students are able to achieve (Muhammad, 2009) and may reflect the weakness of the school culture examined in this study.

Overall, the literature reflects a strong connection between school culture and school effectiveness. Dogan (2017) conducted a literature review to examine the connection between school culture and school effectiveness. Dogan concluded that a school's culture has a significant impact on its effectiveness and proposed that teachers represent the most influential stakeholder group. In addition, Dogan asserted that an effective school with a positive school culture is reflected not only in the academic achievement of its students, but also in the demonstration of ethical character by all stakeholders (Dogan, 2017).

## Summary

School culture affects the experiences of every stakeholder of the school, from administrators to teachers to support staff to students, and beyond the school walls to parents, the superintendent, the school board of directors, and the community. School culture is made up of many complex factors, and the strength of a school's culture is dependent upon the positive "parallel movement" of all of these factors (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014, p. 72). The interconnectedness of the factors that contribute to a positive school culture makes it difficult to address a school's culture with one or even a few simple strategies; however, school leadership, especially administrative leadership, consistently rises to the top of the list of factors that significantly influence school culture.

School culture is a significant aspect of the success of a school and can be influenced positively or negatively depending on the strength of leadership and the adaptability of teachers and staff. School leadership has been identified as one of the most significant influences on school culture, which in turn has a significant influence on several other aspects of school culture, including teacher effectiveness and student achievement. While administrative leadership tends to receive the most attention (and to bear the greatest burden) in building a positive school culture, Kouzes and Posner (2012) asserted the importance of leaders developing new leaders. In a school community, strong and effective leadership can be found among teachers, staff, parents, and students in addition to upper administration and the school's governing body.

Effective school leaders from every aspect of the school community have the capacity to positively influence school culture and in turn school effectiveness. Dutta and Sahney (2016) did not hesitate to assert that "clearly, improvement in teaching and learning is strongly

influenced by the quality of school leadership” (p. 943). Therefore, it is necessary to continue to study school culture and to attempt to identify the leadership behaviors and actions that promote organizational trust, effective communication, teacher efficacy, collaboration, job satisfaction, and retention, which all contribute to a positive school culture.

While many quantitative studies have been conducted to identify factors that contribute to a strong school culture and even characteristics of school leaders that contribute to a strong school culture, few qualitative studies have been conducted. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature and to provide practical information to school leaders as they attempt to create and maintain a positive culture within their schools.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify leadership behaviors that positively influence school culture. Continued research in the area of positive school culture is necessary because of its influence on several aspects of school effectiveness, including teacher effectiveness (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016) and student achievement (Connolly et al., 2011; Roby, 2011). In this chapter, I will provide the details of the research design, information about and the rationale for the setting of the study, and a description of the participants involved. In addition, I will outline the procedures that were followed with extensive details regarding data collection and data analysis. The use of multiple sources for data collection will lead to a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study, after which I will address ethical considerations.

### Design

I utilized a qualitative multiple case study design for this study. Historically, case studies have not always been considered viable research methods, and case study was a term often associated with field work (Yin, 2017). However, case study has been developed and defined over time as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2017, p. 15). A qualitative case study was appropriate to this research because it allows the researcher to address how the behaviors of school leaders positively influence school culture within the context of their natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016; Yin, 2017). I was the human instrument and collected data through interviews, physical artifacts, and direct observations; collecting data from multiple sources allowed me to triangulate the data and build a more robust study (Yin, 2017).

I chose a multiple case study rather than a single case in order to better substantiate the findings of the research (Yin, 2017). Research regarding school culture is important to the field of education due to its implications for teacher effectiveness and student achievement. To that end, a multiple case study allowed me to analyze the cases both individually and cross-case to identify patterns of behavior that contribute to a positive school culture. The results may be used to inform leadership practice and professional development for influencing a positive school culture.

### **Research Questions**

The central question guiding this research is as follows: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?

**RQ 1:** What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?

**RQ 2:** What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?

**RQ 3:** What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?

**RQ 4:** What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?

**RQ 5:** What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?

### **Setting**

This multiple case study was conducted in two public middle schools within one school district, which has been highly ranked among Pennsylvania schools (NICHE, 2018). These middle schools were ranked in the top 50 out of over 700 middle schools in the state of Pennsylvania by Niche (2018). Niche bases its report on statistical data, such as state test scores, teacher-to-student ratio, and parent/student survey results (NICHE, 2018). The report rates the middle schools as “A” overall, and in a separate report, which includes the high school, they have received a rating of an “A” in school culture (NICHE, 2018). Because of the middle

schools' high ratings and proximity to me, the schools were ideal for a study of this nature.

In addition to their school rankings, Montem Middle School (pseudonym) and Silvan Middle School (pseudonym) were recognized for their quality of teachers, who were highly rated. Each middle school has an administrative team that includes one principal and one assistant principal. In addition, two district directors of curriculum (one grades K–6 and one grades 7–12) serve each building. Montem Middle School has approximately 728 students and 61 teachers, and Silvan Middle School serves approximately 752 students with 67 teachers, each with a 12:1 student-to-teacher ratio.

Table 1 identifies student demographics regarding race for Montem Middle School. The student population is predominantly White, with 20% of students representing other races.

Table 1

*Demographics of Montem Middle School Students*

Race	Percentage
Asian	6.5%
Black/African American	1.7%
Hispanic	3.2%
Native American	0.2%
White	80.0%
More than one	8.1%

Table 2 identifies student demographic data with regard to race at Silvan Middle School. The student body is predominantly White with approximately 25% of the student population representing other ethnicities.

Table 2

*Demographics of Silvan Middle School Students*

Race	Percentage
Asian	10.4%
Black/African American	2.5%
Hispanic	3.2%
Native American	0.0%
White	76.0%
More than one	7.4%

### **Participants**

In order to conduct my study, I followed school district procedures to obtain permission from the Board of School Directors to collect data at the middle schools. Then I completed the process of obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Liberty University. Once IRB approval had been received and site permission had been granted, participants were selected for this study. In order to obtain a variety of perspectives from different types of school leaders, purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling requires that the researcher identify the sites and participants based on specific criteria (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2007). For this study, the sites were chosen because they were identified as having a positive school culture, and the participants were identified as leaders, both formal and informal, within the school. Purposeful sampling allowed me to identify participants who have the most experience with or information about the phenomenon of leadership

influences on school culture (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample size consisted of 13 participants, including individuals from the administrative team, faculty, staff, and parent community, with similar representation of each participant type from each school. The participants included school leaders who are administrators, teacher leaders, staff leaders, and parent leaders. In order to protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used for all participants.

### **Procedures**

In order to conduct this study, I completed a thorough review of the literature, prepared interview questions, piloted interview questions, received site permission, and secured IRB approval from Liberty University (see Appendix A). Once IRB approval was received, I sought participants for the study and gained permission from participants to conduct audio-recorded interviews through signed consent forms. I began to identify participants through conversations with administrators. Because there are only two administrators at each school, a personal conversation was the most appropriate way to pursue participation. I then asked the administrators to identify teacher, staff, and parent leaders who could be approached for participation. To those identified, I sent a recruitment email (See Appendix B). As part of the recruitment process, I made participants aware of the procedures that had been put in place to maintain participant confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Identified participants signed an informed consent letter (see Appendix C) to confirm their participation and understanding of the risks and benefits of the study. After IRB approval was received and prior to conducting the interviews, I conducted pilot interviews with each type of participant to evaluate the appropriateness and order of questions, and to practice interviewing techniques and listening skills (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2017). In addition, I conducted practice observations using the observation protocol form (see Appendix E).

Once participants were selected, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interview questions varied to some degree based on the interviewee's position within the school. In other words, I created a separate set of questions for each position: administrator, teacher leader, staff leader, and parent leader. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by me. I also collected artifacts such as each school's mission statement, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) materials, policies, website information, and other items that related to the nature of each school's culture. I also observed school faculty meetings, committee meetings, classroom/hallway/office interactions, and PTSO communications. I utilized an observation protocol in order to record the observation experiences consistently (see Appendix E). These three methods of data collection allowed me to triangulate the data. Stake (2006) emphasized the importance of triangulating the data:

Each important finding needs to have at least three (often more) confirmations and assurances that key meanings are not being overlooked. Each important interpretation needs assurance that it is supported by the data gathered and not easily misinterpreted by readers of the report. (p. 33)

Stake also emphasized the importance of having a plan but with some flexibility so that the researcher does not limit the collection of data.

### **The Researcher's Role**

As a teacher for over 15 years, the subject of school culture and the impact it has on the wellbeing of a school and the school's constituents is very important to me. I have witnessed both positive and negative school culture and recognize the impact that it has on all stakeholders in a school. The middle schools, which are the subjects in this case study, are located in the district where I am employed, but I have never worked in either middle school, nor do I have a

child in the middle school. The culture is unique to each building, and although I have opinions about the culture in the building where I work, I am very curious to learn from the perspectives of others regarding school culture and the influential behaviors of school leaders. While I am acquainted with some of the administration and faculty in the middle school buildings, I do not have significant or authoritative relationships with any of them.

Because qualitative research often requires the researcher to act as the instrument in data collection and analysis, the researcher's own biases and perspectives must be carefully navigated (Yin, 2016). As the human instrument in this study, I collected data through interviews, artifacts/documents, and observations. In addition to collecting data, I journaled my own thoughts and reactions to interviews and observations, and I followed the protocols that I had developed for conducting interviews and observations in order to minimize the impact of my bias (See Appendix D). Continuously during data collection, I reviewed the data and began to identify themes that emerged from the interview transcripts, artifacts, and observation notes. I compared these themes across participants, within each school building, and across the two school buildings.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this case study involved multiple sources. I began collecting artifacts and conducting observations, while also interviewing participants (a similar number from each school). These multiple methods of data collection allowed me to triangulate the data and substantiate the findings.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were the most significant and informative method of data collection utilized in this case study. Interviews are a method of data collection that allows participants to respond to

researcher questions, and they are usually conversational in nature, with the researcher adjusting questioning to maximize the depth of response (Yin, 2014). Interviewing is one of the most common and most effective methods for collecting data in a qualitative study (Yin, 2014). Therefore, I piloted each set of interview questions in order to refine the list of questions and practice the art of listening necessary for effective qualitative interviewing (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2017). At the start of each interview, I reminded the interviewee of the purpose of the study and confirmed that the interview was being audio-recorded.

**Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (Administrator):**

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another, including your name, your role, and the length of time you have been in your role.
2. What motivated you to become a school administrator?
3. What was your path to administration? (i.e., Were you previously a teacher, school counselor, etc.?)
4. How do you feel that your previous experience impacts you as an administrator?
5. How would you describe the climate of your school? In other words, how do you feel when you walk into your building?
6. Would you describe the overall climate as positive or negative? Why?
7. How would you describe the culture in your school? In other words, what are the organizational values and traditions that are foundational to your school culture?
8. Would you describe the overall culture of the school as positive or negative? Why?
9. As an administrator, how do you communicate expectations to your faculty and staff?
10. As an administrator, how do you share your vision among faculty and staff?

11. What is the leadership structure in your building (e.g., the hierarchy or division of leadership)?
12. Are there leaders outside of the leadership team?
13. In what ways do faculty, staff, and other stakeholders have a voice?
14. How do you demonstrate appreciation to your faculty and staff?
15. What do you believe is your role in establishing a positive school culture? How do you accomplish this?
16. Considering your role as a school leader, what else do you believe is important for creating a positive school culture?

Table 3 demonstrates the alignment of the research questions to the interview questions for participants in an administrative role.

Table 3

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions (Administrator)*

Research Questions	Administrator Interview Questions
CQ: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?	4, 9, 10, 15, 16
RQ 1: What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?	9, 10
RQ 2: What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?	9, 10
RQ 3: What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?	11, 12, 13
RQ 4: What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?	11, 12, 13
RQ 5: What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?	14

Questions 1–8 are intended to provide background information and build trust with the

interviewee. Questions 9–16 address the leader’s behavior related to the five tenets of Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) leadership theory. Studies have shown that the role of the administrator has a significant influence on school culture and that there is a necessary balance between leading the work that needs to be done and building the relationships that are foundational to a positive culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Connolly et al., 2011; Lee & Li, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Sebastian et al., 2016). These questions are designed to explore the specific behaviors that administrators exhibit to enhance school culture.

**Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (Teacher):**

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another, including your name, your role, and the length of time you have been in your role.
2. Why did you become a teacher?
3. How do you assert yourself as a teacher leader in your school?
4. How would you describe the climate of your school? In other words, how do you feel when you walk into your building?
5. How would you describe the culture in your school? In other words, what are the organizational values and traditions that are foundational to your school culture?
6. How does your administrator communicate expectations to you?
7. How do you communicate expectations to others?
8. How do you share in the development and communication of the school’s vision?
9. How do you respond if you disagree with the way a situation is being addressed or if you want to try something new?
10. What do you perceive as your role in fostering a positive school culture? How do you go about accomplishing this?

11. How does your administrator show appreciation to others in the school?
12. How do you show appreciation to others?
13. What do you believe is your most significant contribution to the positive culture in your school? How did you achieve this?
14. Considering your role as a school leader, what else do you believe is important for creating a positive school culture?

Table 4 demonstrates the alignment of the research questions to participants who are in a teacher leadership role.

Table 4

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions (Teacher)*

Research Questions	Teacher Interview Questions
CQ: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?	3, 6–14
RQ 1: What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?	6, 7, 10
RQ 2: What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?	8
RQ 3: What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?	9
RQ 4: What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?	3, 13
RQ 5: What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?	11, 12

Questions 1–5 aim to gather background information and establish trust with the interviewee. Questions 6, 9, and 11 reflect the significance of administrator behavior on school culture (Lee & Li, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015), and questions 7–9, 10, and 12–14 address the behaviors of teacher leaders that influence school culture (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Cansoy &

Parlar, 2017; Demir, 2015; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The level of teacher leadership reflects the level of administrative support and trust, and influences teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy; therefore, it is necessary to explore the specific behaviors of teacher leaders that may contribute to a positive school culture.

#### Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (Staff)

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another, including your name, your role, and the length of time you have been in your role.
2. How would you describe the climate of your school? In other words, how do you feel when you walk into your building?
3. How would you describe the culture in your school? In other words, what are the organizational values and traditions that are foundational to your school culture?
4. How does your administrator communicate expectations to you?
5. How do you communicate expectations to others?
6. How do you share in the development and communication of the school's vision?
7. How do you respond if you disagree with the way a situation is being addressed or if you want to try something new?
8. How do you think that teachers and staff can contribute to a positive school culture?
9. What motivated you to take a leadership role within the school?
10. How does your administrator show appreciation to others in the school?
11. How do you show appreciation to others?
12. What do you perceive as your role in fostering a positive school culture? How do you go about accomplishing this?

13. What do you believe is your most significant contribution to the culture in your school?

How did you achieve this?

14. Considering your role as a school leader, what else do you believe is important for creating a positive school culture?

Table 5 demonstrates the alignment of the research questions to participants who represent staff in a leadership role.

Table 5

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions (Staff)*

Research Questions	Staff Interview Questions
CQ: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?	3–14
RQ 1: What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?	4, 5
RQ 2: What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?	6, 8
RQ 3: What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?	7
RQ 4: What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?	6, 8, 13, 14
RQ 5: What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?	10, 11

Questions 1–3 are intended to gather background information and establish trust with the interviewee. Questions 4, 7, and 10 address behaviors of the school administrator that may promote a positive school culture and reflect aspects of Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) leadership theory. Questions 5, 6, 8, 9, and 11–14 address specific behaviors of the staff leader that promote a positive school culture. Like teachers, other school staff can contribute to a positive

school culture and be a mediating factor for student achievement through direct or indirect interaction with students (Frelin & Grannas, 2015; Svanbjornsdottir & Frimannsson, 2016).

**Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions (Parent):**

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another, including your name and your role or involvement with the school.
2. How would you describe the climate of the school? In other words, how do you feel when you walk into your child's school building?
3. How would you describe the culture in your child's school? In other words, what are the organizational values and traditions that are foundational to your child's school culture?
4. How does the administrator of your school build a relationship with you and the PTO, and include you in sharing the school's vision?
5. What motivated you to take a leadership role in the school?
6. How do you encourage the involvement of other parents?
7. In what ways can parents and community members contribute to the positive culture of a school?
8. Considering your role as a school leader, what else do you believe is important for creating a positive school culture?

Table 6 demonstrates alignment of the research questions to the interview questions for participants who represent parents in a leadership role.

Table 6

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions (Parent)*

Research Questions	Parent Interview Questions
CQ: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?	2–8
RQ 1: What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?	4
RQ 2: What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?	4, 6
RQ 3: What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?	6
RQ 4: What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?	4, 6
RQ 5: What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?	6

Questions 1–3 aim to gather background information and establish a relationship with the interviewee. Question 4 reflects the importance of the administrator to school culture (Lee & Li, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015) and the tenets of Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) leadership theory. Questions 5–8 attempt to identify parent leader behaviors that contribute to a positive school culture. Svanbjornsdottir and Frimannsson (2016) identify parental support as a factor in shaping a positive school culture and having a positive effect on student learning.

**Artifacts/Documents**

I also collected artifacts/documents that reflect the culture of each school (Yin, 2017). Artifacts can provide physical evidence to support experiences that are reported in interviews or observed during direct observations (Yin, 2017). Such artifacts may include but are not limited to the mission statement, posters hung throughout the school, SWPBIS rules and expectations, murals, displays, and/or a slogan or logo that represents the school. Each artifact may exemplify

aspects of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory. The mission statement, SWPBIS rules, and a school slogan/logo may demonstrate aspects of the school's shared vision. What is on display may demonstrate who and what the school values and how those people and activities are encouraged and celebrated.

Artifacts were recorded through photographs if they were not mobile or accessible outside of the building. These artifacts contributed to my understanding of how school leaders share the vision and values of the school and how school leaders involve others in sharing the school's vision and values. I used these artifacts in addition to interviews and observations to continue to identify patterns and themes, and to draw conclusions related to the research questions.

### **Observations**

I performed direct observations of faculty meetings and/or committee meetings at each middle school as a nonparticipant observer, taking notes in the background and not directly engaging with the participants, unless I was directly approached by members of the school community (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2017). I also observed daily school activities and interactions in the offices, hallways, and classrooms. Both types of direct observations allowed me to observe the participants' behaviors and interactions in context and in real time. In conducting the observations, I utilized an observation protocol (see Appendix E), which included both descriptive and reflective notes and was used at each site for consistency (Creswell, 2013).

The observations allowed me to build understanding of each case in addition to interviews and the collection of artifacts. Observations provided insight to ways in which school leaders model the way for faculty, staff, students, and parents, in addition to ways in which they build leadership in others and express appreciation for others' work (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Observations also provided evidence for how school leaders encourage challenging the process and/or how school leaders respond when faculty, staff, and students take risks and try new things.

### **Data Analysis**

Once data collection began, I conducted ongoing analyses. I created transcripts of recorded interviews and began to search for themes in the data. Yin (2014) recommended four different data analysis strategies, one of which worked well for this case study (Yin, 2014). Yin suggested “working your data from the ‘ground up’” (Yin, 2014, p. 146), a strategy that begins with reviewing the data in depth without developing any theoretical propositions in advance (Yin, 2017). As I continuously reviewed interview transcripts, themes and patterns began to emerge that reflected school leaders’ influence on school culture. Using the initial themes, I further developed the within and cross-case analyses and related them back to the research questions.

### **Coding**

Coding is a process by which the researcher categorizes data and assigns labels to each code (Creswell, 2013). I used the codes to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the data. Yin (2014) also suggested that when analyzing transcribed data or written documents, the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) can be beneficial. CAQDAS can be useful for coding information in small categories and identifying themes; however, Yin cautions that software is merely a tool, and the researcher must do the analysis (Yin, 2014, 2017). While I initially considered the use of Atlas.ti as a tool in identifying categories and themes through their repetition in text and images, I decided against the use of

computer-assisted software. Themes generally emerged from several codes/categories that represent a common idea (Creswell, 2013).

I reviewed, examined, and coded the interview transcripts and artifacts. In addition, I used the observation notes to corroborate data from the transcripts and school artifacts. I reported the analysis in narrative and tabular form.

### **Member Checks**

Once I procured transcripts of recorded interviews, I asked participants to verify their transcripts. If any changes were required, participants made note of them and returned them to me. Member checking allowed me to confirm with participants that responses had been recorded and understood accurately (Creswell, 2013). Member checking is a valuable tool in adding credibility to the researcher's interpretations of data collected through the interview process.

### **Case Analysis**

I began by developing a description of the school culture and climate for each case, and simultaneously, I began to identify themes within each case. This method of within-case analysis helped me to better understand the individual cases and develop a description for each case. Once I analyzed each case, I began a cross-case analysis. While cross-case analyses can be complex (Stake, 2006), it is important to identify themes that are common across cases.

For cross-case analysis, Stake (2006) discusses three potential tracks for analyzing data. In this study, I used "Track II" and focused on merging case-study findings in order to generalize the results (Stake, 2006, p. 58). Stake's Track I focuses on identifying findings from individual cases, while Track II essentially allows the researcher to bypass Track I and to condense the findings by viewing them holistically rather than situationally (Stake, 2006). While I originally began looking at the cases individually and had conducted my first observation and interview in

Silvan Middle School, as I added experiences with Montem Middle School, it quickly became evident that, as sister schools within the same district, merging the findings made sense. In merging the case findings, the unique cases became less important than the connections that were made cross-case (Stake, 2006).

As I identified codes and themes, I used large poster board and markers to organize the codes into color-coded themes, which I have partially recreated in table format (see Appendix F). I organized the photographs of artifacts in thematic groups as well and used the color-codes to highlight related evidence in the interview transcripts.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the criteria for determining the quality of qualitative research and includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007). Several methods of data collection were used to achieve triangulation of data. Yin (2014) stated, “a major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” (p. 119). The use of multiple sources of data to build in-depth descriptions of each case supports the trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2017).

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the researcher’s accuracy in interpreting participant responses (Schwandt, 2015). Credibility was established through the collection of data via multiple means, and through the rich descriptions that the researcher built during and after data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews with open-ended questions allowed me to include participant quotes to add to the depth and believability of the study, and through these quotes, I

was able to provide a more complete story of each school's culture. In addition, I used member checking to confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability refers to the process of data collection and how well it was documented (Schwandt, 2015). Confirmability refers to the quality of the researcher's interpretations of participant responses and document analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I audio-recorded participant interviews to have accurate documentation of participant responses. I followed this with member checks to verify the interpretations of the data collected through the interview process. Dependability and confirmability were established through the use of these tools and triangulation of the data in addition to the rich descriptions that I built during and after data collection.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the ability to generalize results from this case study to other case studies (Schwandt, 2007). Transferability may be applied to other schools in similar settings with similar demographics. I have chosen a multiple case design in order to obtain more substantial findings. The thick descriptions that result from multiple sources of data collection contribute to the transferability of this qualitative multiple case study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In any research study, it is necessary to conduct research ethically. The researcher has a duty to abide by the rules and guidelines set forth in conducting research with human subjects and to gather and present data without bias and manipulation (Yin, 2014). To that end, I did not begin data collection until IRB approval was received from the university and permission was granted by the school district. In addition, I have made every attempt to collect data accurately

by piloting the interview process, utilizing member checks, and working carefully to identify themes within and across the cases.

The researcher also has a duty to protect participants and their identities. For this reason, I used pseudonyms for each school and for each person who participated in the study. In addition, I obtained informed consent from all who participated in the study (Yin, 2014). Participants were made aware that there were minimal risks associated with this study, and they were informed that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time without recourse. Building trust with participants through these procedures was of the utmost importance for obtaining accurate and rich data.

In addition to protecting the human participants in this study, I have protected the data collected. I used a secure space to hold physical data such as artifacts and notes, and I used a password-protected personal computer to hold digital information regarding participants. Access to this data was limited to me.

### **Summary**

For this qualitative multiple-case study, I interviewed 13 participants from two public middle schools. I developed a set of interview questions for each type of participant and provided rationale for each interview question related to the research questions. In addition, I gathered artifacts that reflect school culture and observed the participants in their natural work setting. Through data analysis, I developed conclusions regarding the leadership behaviors that positively influence school culture. The use of several modes of data collection made the case study more robust and demonstrated trustworthiness (Yin, 2014).

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the specific behaviors of school leaders that contribute to a positive school culture. I collected data through interviews, artifacts, and observations, and through these three data collection methods, I was able to corroborate participant data. As I began to analyze data, it became clear that the themes that emerged related to the five practices and underlying commitments of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) Leadership Challenge, which provided the theoretical framework of this study and connected to each research question. The central question guiding this case study was: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture? The following research questions connected to each aspect of the theoretical framework:

**RQ 1:** What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?

**RQ 2:** What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?

**RQ 3:** What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?

**RQ 4:** What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?

**RQ 5:** What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?

### Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit and select participants for this study. Both the principal of Montem Middle School and the principal of Silvan Middle School agreed to participate in the study and assisted in identifying teacher, staff, and parent leaders in their respective schools. Of the 28 members of the two middle schools who were invited to participate, a total of 13 individuals participated in the interview process. At Montem Middle School, participants included one principal, one assistant principal, three teachers, one school

counselor, and one parent. At Silvan Middle School, participants included one principal, one assistant principal, two teachers, one paraprofessional, and one parent. Of the 13 participants, five were male and eight were female, and all were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Each participant demonstrated leadership, whether indicated by a formal title or an informal role that they assumed within his or her school.

### **Montem Middle School**

Montem Middle School (MMS) is a newer facility, with a bright and welcoming entry to the school and decorated hallways. The moment I walked into the main hallway, I saw signs about ROAR, the school's Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) program, and I noticed posters indicating expected behaviors in every area of the school, including hallways, restrooms, the library, and classrooms. As I passed through the main floor during a class change, I heard students chatting with friends, teachers greeting students, and I saw administrators walking through the halls and engaging with the school. The second floor of the building, which houses the eighth grade teams, felt somewhat isolated from the rest of the building. While there is still the collegiality of faculty and the buzz of students, there is less of a connection to the rest of the school.

Developing relationships and providing a safe learning environment for students is key to the MMS culture. Demonstrated by the Safety and Traumatic Events, Anti-bullying, and Wellness committees, these teacher-led committees help to create a safe environment that is conducive to learning. The teachers, principal, and staff also have student concerns meetings once per six-day cycle with each of the building's teams. These meetings help to ensure student success in academics and behavior. From Jaclyn's perspective, "Everybody is clued in to what the game plan is, and the game plan is keep our kids safe, keep our kids upwardly mobile, keep

our kids excited about why they're here." Relationship-building is an ongoing process.

Administrators work to build relationships with teachers and staff to model the care and concern that they want teachers to develop with students. Faculty and paraprofessional staff are all invited to the monthly faculty meetings, during which representatives of each group are recognized and rewarded through the school's ROAR program, which has expectations for staff as well as students.

### **Eric**

Eric has been an administrator at Montem Middle School for a total of 12 years. He previously was an administrator in a high school setting and taught Health and Physical Education prior to becoming an administrator. Eric described the culture and climate of his school as

. . . very good. I think that our teachers care about one another, um, they care about their students. I feel pretty good about it. I think there's pockets of people who probably don't enjoy it, but I think you have that everywhere. But I think as a whole, I think it's a good place to work and a good environment. . . . I think our teachers care about our students.

. . . I think our teachers are willing to do what they need to do for the students.

Eric keeps a pulse on his building by frequently stopping into classrooms, asking teachers and staff how they are doing, how their families are doing, and demonstrating care and interest about his staff on a personal level.

### **Aaron**

Aaron has been an administrator for three years at Montem Middle School and previously taught for a total of seven years, in both a high school setting and a middle school English classroom. Aaron was encouraged and empowered during his years of teaching to pursue

leadership roles and administrative certification by his principal. Now as a principal himself, he spoke of the importance of modeling expected behaviors such as attitude and respect. “I think that’s something that is the backbone of everything that we are doing because we want everyone to feel respected, heard, valued, appreciated, and that’s something that I try to be intentional about.”

Aaron described the SWPBIS program (ROAR) that the school has implemented as a foundational aspect of the school’s culture. He described the ways in which administrators and teachers model the expectations set forth by the ROAR program by living out those expectations in daily interactions with and recognitions of each other.

### **Lisa**

Lisa has been a teacher in the school district for 23 years in a variety of roles including elementary and middle school experiences. Lisa enjoys being involved, is a team player, and is always looking for ways to lend a hand. Lisa said that she has realized that “the more you put in, the more you get back . . . so I just slowly started finding different opportunities, just little things that I could be involved in.”

Regarding the culture at Montem Middle School, Lisa feels that it is a nurturing environment:

The staff . . . the counselors, or administration, or just different teachers . . . they contribute to the culture by going above and beyond and wanting something more than just the kids getting straight As. So I think the culture is nurturing and caring, understanding, accepting.

Lisa enjoys coming to work every day and working with her team and PLC to provide fun and engaging learning experiences for her students.

**Mary**

Mary serves as a school counselor at Montem Middle School and previously served as a classroom teacher. Mary described the school as nurturing, friendly, professional. As a school counselor, Mary has the opportunity to introduce new and prospective families to the school.

I often take new students around to tour the school . . . that's when I really notice because we're going to every corner of the school, and people stop what they're doing, invite the student and their family in, [and say] 'how are you? Where are you from?' And they treat them like gold, and sometimes these are people who aren't even attending our school yet, so that to me is kind of like the measure, and it makes me feel welcome, too. It makes me feel proud.

Mary sees her role as an advocate for students and a role model as well. She works hard to project positivity to students and colleagues and to be a problem-solver.

**Tim**

Tim has been a teacher for 15 years and loves working with students. He was motivated to become a teacher by his own positive high school experience, and when he walks into Montem Middle School, he feels a sense of belonging. Tim believes that he can help promote a positive culture in his school by "speaking up" and representing the teacher voice, and also "with the joy that you bring into the classroom, the passion for what you do, into the classroom."

While Tim questions the effectiveness of PBIS programs, he always demonstrates professionalism in working with students, especially. Tim prides himself in approaching issues in different ways, being willing to question changes, and being a representative voice for his colleagues.

**Beverly**

Beverly has been a teacher for almost 20 years and described the culture at Montem Middle School as one focused on the goal of building relationships with students. One focus of the ROAR program at MMS is to give every student an adult in the building to connect with; “it’s just so students have an adult they can turn to, somebody they know cares about them, and they feel safe and welcome in our school environment every day.” Beverly makes building relationships with students and colleagues a focus of each day, and said,

My goal every day is to talk to as many students as I can, to even smile at them or say hello, or how was your day? How was your break? How was your weekend? What are you doing after school today? . . . just to try to touch base with as many students as I can every day.

Beverly treats her colleagues with the same care and respect, and believes that acknowledging everyone in the building, saying hello, smiling, and checking in with people helps to maintain a positive climate.

**Jaclyn**

Jaclyn serves as a parent leader at Montem Middle School and strongly believes in the importance of parent involvement and the impact that it has on relationships within the school community, including with her children and their friends, other parents, and the school’s faculty, staff, and administration. Jaclyn believes that the physical presence of parents at school-related events demonstrates support not only for their own children but also to school personnel. She believes that this show of support strengthens relationships and improves the students’ overall learning experiences and stated, “Those kids, they stand taller, and they are more engaged, they

know that a parent is there. And I don't think you can ever replace that face value time in any way, shape, or form. It's so essential."

Jaclyn feels that the culture of Montem Middle School is one of openness and team leadership.

It's just a very open kind of culture. And I really appreciate that there are no closed doors. I have felt like I can approach and talk to everybody from janitors to building principals. Everybody's just very quick to answer questions or point you in the right direction to where you're supposed to be, which has been fantastic.

In addition, the team structure allows for every student to be known. Jaclyn feels that the openness and team leadership create a bridge between school and families that allows for strong relationships and parent involvement.

### **Silvan Middle School**

When I entered Silvan Middle School (SMS), the office staff cheerfully greeted visitors and were eager to help. As I began to walk the hallways, I saw celebrations of diversity and the school's vision, Every Student Every Day, posted above each classroom doorway. The facility is older and often dark in the winter months, but the energy of students and staff brightens the atmosphere. While I walked through the hall to morning committee meetings with Linda, the principal, she greeted everyone she passed and often stopped to have a conversation with teachers and staff. Linda wants to model the expectation that interacting with colleagues is important and part of how the school functions.

Throughout the school, posters and signs about ROAR, the school's SWPBIS program, indicated valued character traits and behavioral expectations in different areas of the school. The building, which is all one level, stretched on, and the hallways which are centered around grade-

level teams created a strong team connection but felt rather disconnected from the rest of the school.

The artwork on display throughout the building celebrated students and diversity. There was student work on display, throughout the hallways, which included both projects and posters to inspire peers to treat each other well and to promote a safe environment.

### **Linda**

Linda has been a school administrator for over 15 years after beginning her career in the classroom as a world language teacher. Linda has spent the last 14 years as an administrator at Silvan Middle School and earned her Ph.D. in Education Administration along with her administrative certification. Linda described the culture and climate of her school as a

. . . utopia. I mean, there's no place in the world I would rather be. I student-taught in my building, I taught in my building, I'm the principal in my building. So I have a lot of allegiance to this building, and you know, I have a lot of fond memories. I think we have amazing people, and every time we have the opportunity to hire someone new, it's a new opportunity to kind of fit that person in with the culture that we have, which is very student-centered. People do a great job of having fun, engaging activities with the kids, so that hiring piece is so incredibly important to kind of creating that culture that you want to create. And we have very positive people, that are very motivated. They set the bar high for one another as well.

Part of Linda's leadership style is to empower other leaders. She feels strongly that leadership should not be "top-down" and embraces a flat leadership model. She wants teachers and staff to feel confident in offering solutions, trying new ideas, and knowing that they are supported and trusted in their professional responsibilities.

**Craig**

Craig has been an administrator for six years at Silvan Middle School after spending one year as an administrator in a high school setting. Prior to becoming an administrator, Craig taught in another school district for 15 years as a certified social studies and driver education teacher. In addition to teaching, Craig coached several sports teams and expressed that the experiences provided to him in the classroom and as a coach contributed to his motivation to pursue administrative certification.

Craig recognizes the collective expertise of the school community and the value of developing as professionals.

You come into the building, and if there's something that you feel is best for kids or can help you as the classroom teacher, you're going to have it, or you're going to get it. . . .

We're very good in this building and in our district about professional development . . . the overall culture is one of a growth mindset, that's how I would describe it.

This dedication to continued professional growth cultivates an environment of trusted professionals who voluntarily step into leadership roles, problem-solve, and offer solutions.

**Barbara**

Barbara has been a teacher for 24 years and has served as a teacher leader for many of those years in a variety of roles. Barbara has a passion for developing, supporting, and encouraging others whether as a mentor teacher or collaborative team member. Barbara credits the team structure of her building for the loyal, family-like feel that she shares with her team colleagues.

Barbara feels encouraged and supported to take risks and try new things at Silvan Middle School. With the collaboration of team members and PLCs, Barbara enjoys working through

new ideas and implementing them. And if a new idea did not go as planned, she said, “My administration would support me in that. It wouldn’t be a fail; it would be a ‘now you’re on to the next try.’”

### **Melissa**

Melissa has been a classroom teacher for 20 years and prides herself in being solution-oriented. She is a supportive colleague who helps others implement ideas, and if she is passionate about an idea, she finds ways to remove obstacles to make it happen.

If I see something that could be made better or if I see a problem, you know I just try to find a solution and approach people who can make those decisions and say, “Hey this is what I’m seeing, and this is what could be done.”

Melissa feels encouraged to take risks and try new things.

Linda especially has always said, if you’re trying something new, and you want me to come watch and see how it goes, she’ll come in and give us advice . . . and if it’s a failure, [she will] try to find the positives in it and also give us some suggestions for how to improve it for the next time.

Melissa believes that an openness to new ideas and a willingness to learn from failure are essential to a strong school culture.

### **Brenda**

Brenda has been a paraeducator at Silvan Middle School for five years. She previously taught in an elementary setting and worked as a director for children and family ministries at a church. Brenda shared the following about the climate and culture of Silvan Middle School: “Climate-wise, work-wise, it’s very comfortable, the kids are very, very well-behaved. Feels very safe.”

Brenda emphasized the importance of approachability and trustworthiness to being a successful leader. People need to feel that you care about them, and that you are “willing to get [your] hands dirty with them. Serve . . . make mistakes and to admit mistakes. Be willing to say ‘whoops, I’m sorry . . . I botched up here,’ and admit it and put it aside, and move forward.”

### **Bill**

Bill has a child who attends Silvan Middle School and feels strongly that a positive school experience includes positive parent involvement. While Bill feels that parental involvement is less welcome at the middle than elementary level, Bill especially wants fathers to take an active role in their child’s educational experience. He suggests that it is important for parents to encourage children to become involved in something and then share in that activity with them. Bill has had positive experiences with the administration and staff at SMS and believes that “their hearts are in it.” In working with administration at SMS, Bill felt that Linda “establishes relationships face to face . . . she just does it when you’re interacting with her, and for that reason . . . I trust her.”

As an educational leader himself, Bill has strong opinions about the needs of education and the systems that drive education or limit educational opportunities. Ultimately though, Bill believes in the power of parent involvement and family to helping the school community:

I think their presence alone is the thing . . . what’s really necessary is just, I think, love your kid, and take care of what’s going on in your home, and that’s where you have the most positive impact on the community.

## Results

The results of this study will be presented by answering each research question in tabular and narrative form. These results were established through the development of themes related to each research question and the triangulation of data from artifacts, interviews, and observations.

### Theme Development

As part of the data collection process, I simultaneously collected artifacts, performed observations, and conducted interviews. This process of simultaneous data collection allowed for themes, patterns, and connections to emerge. After each interview, I listened to the recording and personally transcribed the conversation. After I finished transcribing each interview, I listened to it again while reading the transcript to check for any errors or missed information. After I checked each transcript by listening and reading, I sent it to the interviewee for review and asked each interviewee to respond with acceptance of or changes to the transcript. Member checking strengthens the researcher's credibility, and I recorded the date of participant responses on their interview transcripts.

Next, I began to identify themes, which were emerging from the data, and I created a list of codes for each theme in a table format. I created categories for interview data, artifact data, and observation data and color-coded the themes. As I read through each interview a third time, I began to highlight themes in different colors. Then, utilizing the codes associated with each theme, I combed through the interviews a fourth time to pull out quotes that pertained to each code. At the same time, I identified examples of the codes demonstrated by pictures of artifacts, documents (such as school policies), and website information in addition to observation notes as collected via the observation protocol (see Appendix E). I read through the interview transcripts several more times as I continuously expanded the connections to the themes and my depth of

understanding of the specific behaviors of school leaders that contribute to a positive school culture.

**Expectations and values.** Table 7 demonstrates the codes associated with the first two themes, expectations and values. Codes connected to the themes of expectations and values included the schools' Schoolwide Positive Behavior and Supports Programs, visibility and/or presence of administration, diversity and inclusivity, and continuous learning and professional development.

Table 7

*Themes: Expectations and Values*

Code	Explanation of Code	Associated Behavior(s)	Sample Data
Diversity/Inclusion	Celebrations of diversity and inclusion of various minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make values visible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inclusive Excellence Policy (District)</li> <li>▪ Diversity posters (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ LGBTQA poster (student-made, SMS)</li> </ul>
Learning/ Professional Development	Continuous learning is encouraged and provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue learning with your colleagues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “We’re very good in this building and in our district about professional development.” (Craig, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “We do a lot more professional development at our faculty meetings now.” (Melissa, SMS)</li> </ul>
ROAR/PBIS/ Schoolwide/SWIS	These terms represent the SWPBIS programs implemented at each school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clearly communicate expectations and meet those expectations oneself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Posters/Bulletin Boards with expectations (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ ROAR paws/tickets (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ “I’m our building’s ROAR coach.” (Aaron, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “I’m really passionate about schoolwide . . .” (Aaron, MMS)</li> </ul>

Visibility/  
Positive Presence/  
Engagement

Administration being visible throughout the building and engaging with teachers and students regularly.

- Interact with others purposefully
- Be visible and engaged in the day-to-day operations of the school.

- “They are frequently visible, they walk down the hall, they stop in our rooms, they ask us how we are, you know, fist bumps in the hall.” (Lisa, MMS)
- “. . . just being present. Just being out and about and involved.” (Barbara, SMS)

The themes expectations and values developed from codes that were associated with ways in which school leaders made the schools’ values visible and set an example of what values are foundational to the schools’ culture. Linda recognizes the significance of her behavior and articulated the importance of setting the tone:

So I think everything that I do has an impact on the school climate and culture of this building because people watch you. I think people watch if you are engaged, people watch if you’re not engaged, people watch your body language, you know, everything you do is observed, so I think you have to constantly be on stage all day long, and be very aware, even if you’re sick and not feeling well, you leave that at the door. And you bring that positivity into the building.

What people see throughout the building also demonstrates the values and expectations that are part of the school culture. Posters celebrating diversity, posters encouraging inclusion of minority groups, and representation of multiple languages on signage demonstrate that the schools value diversity and inclusion. Expectations posted throughout the school and displays of ROAR in high-traffic locations help to demonstrate the behaviors that both middle schools value and what is expected of people in the building. In addition, the system of rewards and celebrations associated with ROAR further emphasize valued behaviors and encourage staff and students to meet expectations.

Through interviews and observations, the schools' focus on continuous learning for adults as well as students was evident. During faculty meetings that I observed, while time was allotted for celebrations and announcements, the majority of the meeting time was devoted to professional learning, such as mindfulness training at Silvan Middle School and a discussion of a staff read at Montem Middle School. Through interviews, several participants discussed the value of a growth mindset and the myriad opportunities for professional development. Craig shared that "we have a lot of faculty and staff including myself that may not be here in the building at times because we're out attending a conference . . . or it's professional development . . . that's ongoing."

In addition, faculty and administration alike expressed the importance of administrative presence in classrooms, hallways, and shared spaces, such as the cafeteria. Craig discussed his daily practice of having lunch in the cafeteria, and Beverly and Barbara both expressed a desire to have a greater administrative presence in more remote areas of the building. Beverly shared a concern that "they do not come up into our hallway very often . . . so we would love to see more administrative presence in our hallway." The presence and visibility of administration throughout the school has the potential to mitigate student behavior as well as demonstrate support for teachers and staff. This show of support for teachers and staff contributes positively to the school's culture.

**Vision and foundations of culture and climate.** Table 8 demonstrates the codes associated with the themes vision and foundations of culture/climate. The codes associated with these themes included relationships, terms related to the schools' PBIS programs, student safety, and students themselves. The code student, and variations of the word as shown below, was the

most frequently occurring code in the data collected. From artifacts, observations, and interviews, the focus on students was clear.

Table 8

*Themes: Vision and Foundations of Culture/Climate*

Code	Explanation of Code	Associated Behavior(s)	Sample Data
Relationships	The connection between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the purpose of the work and remind people regularly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “The culture is to build relationships with the students, and really get to know students as individuals.” (Beverly, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “. . . positive relationships and again just checking in with people.” (Eric, MMS)</li> </ul>
ROAR/PBIS/ Schoolwide/SWIS	These terms represent the SWPBIS programs implemented at each school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the purpose of the work and remind people regularly</li> <li>▪ Make expectations clear and engage all stakeholders in the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Posters/Bulletin Boards with expectations (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ “I’m our building’s ROAR coach.” (Aaron, MMS)</li> <li>▪ ROAR paws/tickets (MMS; SMS)</li> </ul>
Safe/safety/anti-bullying/anti-harassment	All efforts to promote a safe and welcoming learning environment for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make people feel safe and welcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Anti-harassment policy (District)</li> <li>▪ Anti-bullying policy (District)</li> <li>▪ “. . . keep kids safe . . .” (Jaclyn, MMS)</li> <li>▪ Website information (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ Safe2Say Something (District)</li> <li>▪ Safe at School/Attendance (District)</li> </ul>
Student(s)/kid(s)/child	Any term that refers to the student stakeholder group in the school community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the purpose of the work and remind people regularly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Every Student Every Day” (SMS)</li> <li>▪ “We continue to get better for students.” (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “Best atmosphere for student learning.” (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “Great kids.” (Linda, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “Kids are the reason I got into this business.” (Aaron, MMS)</li> </ul>

The themes vision and foundations of culture and climate developed from the codes that relate to establishing an environment open to creating new opportunities and inviting others to share in the school's vision. From artifacts displayed on the walls of the schools and on the schools' websites and interview responses, the primary focus of each school was clear: students, their safety, and their learning. Administrators, teachers, staff, and parents alike discussed the focus on developing students and providing a safe environment. The explicitly stated vision at Silvan Middle School, "Every Student Every Day," was displayed above every classroom door, is included in the signature of school staff emails, and was emphasized by Linda throughout her interview: "it's on everybody's tagline, it's above every door, the kids end with it every day for the news." All other stakeholders agreed. Beverly (Montem Middle School), Brenda, and Melissa (Silvan Middle School), all discussed the importance of building relationships with students, creating the best learning atmosphere for students, and meeting students where they are in their learning. Beverly said, "[I] just try to touch base with as many students as I can every day. I think that's why I'm here, is to be a little bit of a positive light in their day each day." Brenda echoed the sentiment that she is there for the students: "I'm very much an advocate for the kids that I work with." Parents at both middle schools agreed that the administrators and teachers at both schools cared deeply about their students and worked to support students in their learning. Both Jaclyn and Bill shared stories about casually seeing their child's teacher, and the positive interactions that demonstrated care for their child.

The ROAR program at each school is part of the vision as well and serves as a foundation for the culture at each school. Representatives from all stakeholder groups, including teachers, staff, and parents, share in the development and revision of this program, its expectations, and its rewards. Finally, both schools, as evident in their committee work, policies, and expectations,

value creating a safe environment, in which students can learn and grow, both academically and socially. Bill shared, “I like their messaging with the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Program,” and as an educator himself, he appreciates the efforts to reduce bullying and promote safety.

**Listening and problem-solving.** Table 9 shows the codes associated with the themes listening and problem-solving for each middle school. The codes associated with these themes included the importance of listening, shared decision-making, being solution-oriented, and a willingness to try new things or take risks in the classroom.

Table 9

*Themes: Listening and Problem-Solving*

Code	Explanation of Code	Associated Behavior(s)	Sample Data
Listening/ active listening	Being open to hearing what others have to say, openness to ideas and feedback, knowing the best time to speak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listen and respond rather than react</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities to give input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “It’s being a good listener and being a good communicator.” (Linda, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “You don’t always have to speak . . . do I really need to say this now?” (Barbara, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “You have to be a good listener, you have to not always be talking, [or] be the one that’s leading everything.” (Craig, SMS)</li> </ul>
Shared decision-making	Allowing the input of other stakeholders to inform administrative decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share in the decision-making process</li> <li>▪ Provide opportunities to give input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “It’s a team effort, and everyone has some input and can be part of the decision-making process.” (Craig, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “It’s – you get to be part of the decision-making process.” (Mary, MMS)</li> </ul>
Solution-oriented	Focus on the solution, not the problem; work to remove obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Value ideas and solutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “You know, I just try to find a solution and approach the people that can make those decisions.” (Melissa, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “And if it doesn’t work, . . . we’ll look at another possible solution.” (Barbara, SMS)</li> </ul>

Try new things/  
new ideas/  
take risks

Willingness and  
comfortability in taking  
risks in trying new ways  
of doing things and  
sharing ideas

▪ Take risks by trying  
new things

- “If I want to try something new in my classroom, I do it.” (Barbara, SMS)
- “. . . try to grow my idea [with my PLC] or look at it from a different way before implementing it.” (Lisa, MMS)
- “So anybody who tried something new . . . [gets] a kudos.” (Linda, SMS)

The themes listening and problem-solving developed from codes that related to seeking solutions and also trying new ideas in the classroom. Providing opportunities for stakeholders to give input and actively listening to input helps to create an environment in which people are willing to offer solutions. Good leaders were regularly identified by all stakeholders as those who were willing to listen, and also those who did not always feel the need to speak in every situation. Craig and Barbara both recognized the effectiveness of being judicious in providing input so that when input is given, it is valued. Craig stated, “you have to be a good listener, you have to not always be talking, [or] be the one that’s leading everything.” Craig said that he likes “going back to the larger group and asking what would work . . . you like that feedback,” and he values that shared decision-making reflects the culture of the school.

In addition to listening and accepting input, when stakeholders feel that they are part of the decision-making process, they tend to focus more on offering solutions to problems than the problems themselves. At Montem Middle School, Beverly said that she felt comfortable sharing her concerns and ideas.

I feel that I often will speak up at faculty meetings if I want my voice to be heard and certain opinions I have on things. I’m also on a traumatic events and safety committee here . . . and if I have concerns, I feel other people might have those same concerns as

well . . . but I try to do it in a positive way to say, ‘hey, maybe we need to look at this.’ Eric agreed that when possible, faculty and staff input is considered: “We’re willing to have them pop in and have a conversation with us, and uh, willing to take their input. I think that’s important.”

Hand-in-hand with problem-solving, experimenting with new ideas and taking risks was demonstrated and valued by leaders in each school. Linda made it very clear that trying something new was praiseworthy and never a “gotcha” moment, even if it did not go well. Teachers and staff alike felt empowered to take risks in the classroom, and Barbara said, “if I want to try something new in my classroom, I do it!”

**Relationships and building leaders.** Table 10 demonstrates the codes associated with the themes relationships and building leaders. The codes associated with these themes include trust, team, collaboration, PLC, leadership opportunities, and access. Trust and collaboration were the most frequently occurring codes within these themes.

Table 10

*Themes: Relationships and Building Leaders*

Code	Explanation of Code	Associated Behavior(s)	Sample Data
Trust	The belief in the reliability or honesty of another person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrate and build trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “[Eric] and I really try to allow people to have the . . . freedom and trust to do their job.” (Aaron, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “I think they just trust us completely.” (Beverly, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “I trust the principal and the assistant principal . . . (Bill, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “We have a . . . let me know what you need, hands off trust.” (Tim, MMS)</li> </ul>

Team	The purposeful grouping of teachers based on shared students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support opportunities for collaboration</li> <li>▪ Provide leadership opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “I would do anything for my team. I love my team.” (Barbara, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “. . . seven different teams” (Linda, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “The team meetings . . . are another way to have a voice.” (Craig, SMS)</li> </ul>
Team/ collaboration	Working together to accomplish shared goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support opportunities for collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “. . . to develop a collaboration . . . (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “It’s a team effort . . .” (Craig, SMS)</li> </ul>
PLC	The purposeful grouping of teachers based on shared curriculum and instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support opportunities for collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “We have a strong, like, we’re involved in PLCs, so math and science, I work with two other teachers.” (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “A lot of times it is talked about in our PLC.” (Barbara, SMS)</li> </ul>
Leadership opportunities	Formal and informal ways for stakeholders to demonstrate leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide leadership opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Team leaders” (Linda, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “I just said that I’m not a school leader, and I guess I’m not by job description . . . but I do, I take it really seriously, and I always sign up for any opportunity.” (Mary, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “I was asked to be a committee leader for . . .” (Lisa, MMS)</li> </ul>
Access	Making participation and information available to all stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Do you need a ride? Can I take you for coffee after?” (Jaclyn, MMS)</li> <li>▪ Facebook page information (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ Website information (MMS; SMS)</li> </ul>

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The themes relationships and building leaders developed from the codes associated with building trust, encouraging collaboration, and developing leaders. Building trust, including prioritizing the development of the relationships necessary to form trust, emerged as an essential factor in promoting a collaborative culture, in which teachers, staff, and parents are willing to

step into leadership roles. Jaclyn said, “I was really impressed again . . . that I met both [Eric] and [Aaron] day one, met them right out of the gate, that they sought out new people right away to kind of pull into the fold.” She also discussed the effectiveness of the team structure in a large school and how it helps to create the culture where students are individually known and supported. “I think one of the big reasons why is the organization structure of the team structure. And that really giving that – these are your people . . . this is yours.” The team aspect, both in terms of purposeful grouping of teachers and in terms of a group effort, played a big part in the positive culture of each middle school.

Teams and committees offered opportunities for leadership, providing input, and sharing in the decision-making process as each team and committee has a leader. In addition, teams, committees, and PLCs provide opportunities for collaboration and building more meaningful relationships. Barbara, Melissa (Silvan Middle School), Tim, and Lisa (Montem Middle School) all shared their love for working with their teams and PLCs and the ways in which those collaborative relationships improved their job performance and job satisfaction. Lisa said, “I like bouncing ideas off of those two [PLC] teachers in particular because they’re fun, and they’re motivated and enthusiastic.” She recognizes the value of PLCs in helping to grow ideas and improving the students’ learning experiences.

The themes of relationships and building leaders also reflect the importance of access. Access to information, to participation, and to leadership all contribute to a positive school culture. As a parent leader at Montem Middle School, Jaclyn felt that providing access, especially to families, was an important part of the school experience. Even if someone was unable to attend a meeting or an event, Jaclyn emphasized the importance of allowing others to share in the experience: “I took a ton of live video at [name of event], um, we immediately post

our meeting notes on Facebook and email them out to parents.” She said that she does not want anyone to feel “punished” for not being there, and providing access and information is a great step in keeping families involved.

**Appreciation.** Table 11 demonstrates the codes associated with the theme appreciation. These codes included personal notes, ROAR paws/tickets, thank you in person, being specific, open-door policy, and time.

Table 11

*Theme: Appreciation*

Code	Explanation of Code	Associated Behavior(s)	Sample Data
Personal notes	Handwritten notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Handwrite thank you notes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “A guy took the time to write a little card and put it in an envelope and put it in my mailbox. That’s really nice.” (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “I’m a big believer in the handwritten note.” (Aaron, MMS)</li> </ul>
ROAR paws/tickets	Systematic method of teacher, staff, and student recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Celebrate people via systems of acknowledgment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website link (MMS; SMS)</li> <li>▪ ROAR drawing (observation, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “At the beginning of each meeting, they draw like, three teachers.” (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “There’s tickets for students who are following expectations, and then there are tickets for the adults, and we can write them to each other.” (Mary, MMS)</li> </ul>
Thank you in person/in the moment	Expressing gratitude or praise face-to-face in real time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize face-to-face communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “I try and let people know right on the spot . . . ‘that’s a good job.’” (Lisa, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “I try, I do tell them in the moment when a thought crosses my mind. . . . I’ll say I thought that lesson was really cool.” (Mary, MMS)</li> </ul>

Be specific	Expressing gratitude or praise individually and for specific actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Handwrite thank you notes</li> <li>▪ Celebrate people via systems of acknowledgement</li> <li>▪ Share acknowledgement with others</li> <li>▪ Prioritize face-to-face communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “But I do try to be specific. I’ve learned that through ROAR. You know, you don’t want to be just ‘hey, good job everyone.’” (Mary, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “. . . not just ‘hey, good job’ but ‘hey I really see this in you.’” (Aaron, MMS)</li> </ul>
Open-door policy	Administrators welcome stakeholder input any time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prioritize face-to-face communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “They have an open-door policy . . . it’s a lot of open doors . . . I can go to them.” (Melissa, SMS)</li> <li>▪ “Our doors are always open to them coming in . . .” (Eric, MMS)</li> </ul>
Time	Using staff/teachers’ time productively and respecting personal time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Respect people’s time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “They are respectful of people’s time.” (Mary, MMS)</li> <li>▪ “To value people’s time . . . while they are at school, but also to value people’s time when they’re not at school.” (Aaron, MMS)</li> </ul>

The theme appreciation reflected codes related to acknowledging individual contributions, respecting others, and celebrating the school community. Administrators and other faculty and staff leaders emphasized the importance of timely and specific expressions of gratitude. Aaron described himself as a “big believer in the handwritten note,” which Lisa and others said they really appreciated. Tim expressed, “I don’t fuss too much over a piece of paper or other things, but any time that an administrator says a subtle ‘thank you’ I appreciate it . . . I think that our administrators are genuine in their words and actions.” For Tim, even something as informal as a pat on the back or a quick text made him feel appreciated. The use of ROAR tickets as part of the schools’ system of rewards also demonstrated a way to provide personal and specific gratitude while also celebrating publicly. Mary said that the ROAR tickets are a good way to thank someone in a specific way and said, “I do try to be specific. I’ve learned that through ROAR . . . I do write the ROAR tickets, too.”

Respecting people's time and having an open-door policy also go a long way in helping faculty, staff, and parents feel valued in the school community. Faculty, staff, and parents alike at Montem and Silvan Middle Schools felt comfortable approaching administration and sharing input, and they felt that their time was valued and respected. Aaron emphasized respecting people's time during school and not burdening them with communication outside of school. "I think it's important for people to recognize that whenever they're home, they should be home. And emails don't need to be responded to at all hours of the day." Valuing people's time and respecting a work-life balance positively influences the school's culture.

### **Research Question Responses**

Using the themes and codes developed in the previous section, I developed four to five specific behaviors that school leaders, including administrators, teachers, staff, and parents utilize to positively influence school culture. These behaviors, which stemmed from each of the themes, connect to the five tenets of the leadership theory developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012). The central question, "How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?", was addressed through the individual research questions that connect to each aspect of Kouzes and Posner's leadership framework.

**Research question one.** Through interviews, observations, and artifacts, the data collected provided answers to the first research question, "What specific behaviors of school leaders model the way?" Modeling the way requires school leaders to make clear what the organization values and to set an example by their own actions (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The themes of expectations and values align with Kouzes and Posner's first tenet, as the schools' values and expectations were modeled by school leaders and what was displayed throughout each school. Being visible and engaged in the school, continuously learning with colleagues,

building relationships with others, and modeling what is valued contribute to ways in which school leaders model the way to influence a positive school culture.

*Be visible and engaged in the day-to-day operations of the school.* Visibility of school leaders, particularly administrators, surfaced as a behavior of great importance. This can be challenging, especially for principals who are often called out of the building to the district's central office or to attend other district level meetings. Barbara summed up the importance well when she said,

“If I were an administrator I would want to try to get into a classroom with as many different kids and teachers as I could so that I could hang onto that . . . aspect of what I do . . . because if you don't know what's going on, you really can't be a leader in that building.”

In order for building leaders to stay connected with what is happening in the building, to support teachers and staff in their work, and to build relationships with students, it is necessary to be out of their offices. Craig shared, “I'm out and about. I'm in lunch. . . . I eat lunch with the kids . . . the kids need to see me, and I need to be out there with them.” For Eric, checking in with teachers and routinely taking the pulse of the school is necessary to build a positive school culture:

Walking around and checking in with your teachers. Just making sure that they're doing okay . . . popping your head in, how you doing? If they have kids, sharing and talking about them, asking them how they are doing, how's their band concert.

Lisa discussed the importance of visibility and positive interactions and said, “They are frequently visible, they walk down the hall, they stop in our rooms, they ask us how we are, you know fist bumps in the hall.” Lisa continued to share that having this positive relationship with

administration and knowing that they care about faculty, staff, and students as individuals makes people want to be there. Beyond being visible, it is important to interact purposefully throughout the building to build relationships with faculty, staff, and students.

***Interact with others purposefully.*** Visibility can start with presence in the hallways and other common areas of the building and interacting purposefully with people in those places.

Linda said,

I think when people see me acknowledging every single person when I go down the hallway, “Good morning, Tim, good morning, Susie,” they also think, “Ok, this is a place it is expected to recognize each other when you walk down the hall, not ignore each other.”

Beverly agreed that acknowledging people and being upbeat makes a difference in the atmosphere of the school. Taking the time for “saying hello and goodbye and smiling at people” sometimes requires effort but pays off in terms of creating a positive climate within the school. Not only does treating others with kindness and respect boost the climate of the school, school personnel model expected behaviors for students to follow.

Leaders understand the importance of building relationships to establishing trust and making forward progress within the organization. Leaders also understand that building relationships means more than knowing their colleagues as professionals. Building relationships means getting to know people and showing an interest in their lives outside of school. In an organization where building relationships is an important, if not the most important, goal, Eric recognizes the following:

If we expect teachers to build relationships with our kids, we have to build relationships with our teachers. . . . If I’m not walking the walk, it doesn’t mean anything. So I think

anything I'm talking about, if I say I'm going to do something, I have to have some follow through.

Interactions with colleagues and relationship building need to be purposeful and meaningful.

Leaders who model this encourage others to follow suit.

***Continue learning with your colleagues.*** Being visible also means engaging and learning with colleagues. At both Montem and Silvan Middle Schools, faculty meetings have primarily become opportunities for professional development, and building leaders participate alongside their colleagues during these opportunities. At Montem Middle School, faculty and staff attend faculty meetings; this includes paraprofessional staff who are invited and encouraged to attend. At a recent meeting, the expectation was to have read the book *The Hard Hat: 21 Ways to Be a Great Teammate* by Jon Gordon. With the assistance of the instructional technology coaches, who selected activities that modeled good instructional practice, Aaron led and engaged in meaningful team-building work around this book.

At Silvan Middle School, a recent faculty meeting focused on mindfulness practices, and a guest speaker engaged faculty and administration in professional development in the area of mindfulness. At subsequent faculty meetings, committees are scheduled to lead professional development and report on what they have learned through their work during the school year, including providing strategies, lessons, and opportunities for colleagues.

Ongoing professional development is valued throughout the school district, and teachers are encouraged and provided resources to attend conferences outside of the school as well. Lisa commented that she has appreciated being asked to attend conferences. "Another thing that's always nice is just being asked if, 'hey, would you mind going to this conference?'" She values the opportunity to get new ideas and consider how she might implement them, and it makes her

feel valued as a teacher that the school is willing to invest in her. Mary confirmed that continuous learning is important and accessible in a variety of ways: “I go to a lot of workshops, conferences, webinars, I even started doing those . . . so I keep learning,” and as a role model for others, she thinks it is important to keep learning and trying new things. Lisa identified continuous learning as a foundational piece of the school’s culture:

I’ve seen our administration, and I’ve gone to some conferences where they’re constantly discussing what other schools are doing to make things better for them . . . to have continuous improvement to create the best atmosphere for student learning and also improving our culture. I think that’s important here.

***Make values visible.*** Through their actions and how the school presents itself to both the people who live in the building and to those who visit, what the school values needs to be apparent. When walking through Silvan Middle School, the school’s vision, Every Student Every Day, is posted at every classroom entrance. According to Linda, Craig, and Brenda, it is the tagline on every staff member’s email, and it is broadcast daily as part of the school announcements. In both middle schools, student work and student achievements are posted in the hallways and on bulletin boards, and the focus on students is evident at every turn.

Both middle schools value diversity and inclusivity as demonstrated from the district level to individual schools. The district implemented an inclusive excellence policy, which promotes a physically, socially, and emotionally safe environment for all students, whose backgrounds and experiences are respected and valued. These district values are represented in the middle schools through their PBIS programs and artifacts found throughout the buildings. From posters and signs encouraging respect, promoting diversity, valuing minority communities, to signs throughout the building identifying places and objects in several languages, the message

states that differences are celebrated and this is an important piece of the school's culture. Aaron commented, "Our population is really changing a lot, and we're seeing a lot of underserved populations coming in. . . . I really want to see those families and those kids feeling like they're part of [our community]," and using a different language each month, Linda greets her students every morning as they enter the building. Diversity and inclusivity are clearly valued within the school community.

Finally, making values visible can be done through a leader's own behavior. Mary recognizes that "you're a leader in the way, just by the sense of the word, by your behavior," not necessarily by a title. "It's not about being in charge . . . but it's helping and thinking that I can contribute." It's getting to be "part of the decision-making sometimes." Whether demonstrating the value placed on individual student success or modeling continuous learning, leaders, both formally and informally designated, contribute to an organization's values with their actions.

***Clearly communicate expectations and meet those expectations oneself.*** Both Montem Middle School and Silvan Middle School operate within a PBIS framework, which promotes explicit instruction of expectations. These expectations for students are clearly posted throughout the school, shared on the schools' websites, and communicated through small group instruction. In addition, Montem Middle School has developed expectations for teachers that are shared with teachers and listed on the school's website as well. This explicit communication of expectations allows for behaviors to be clearly understood and addressed consistently.

In addition to posting expectations in prominent places, providing explicit instruction of expectations is important for adults and children. Mary and Melissa both discussed the importance of small group, face-to-face interaction. When asked how expectations are communicated, Mary said,

Well, there's assemblies, there's meetings, there's emails, there's one-on-one, there's all of the above. . . . Emails tend to come for general announcements, you know, "this is coming up" or whatever, but everything else is done in person. Students, same, we divide them into smaller groups and share with them.

Melissa said the same of her preferred communication of expectations. "I think just talking as a table . . . I think that's where we communicate best, and we can, again, have those conversations about expectations and what needs to be done and accomplished. So, I think small meetings are the best." Email has a purpose and value in its convenience to send reminders and other information quickly, but it does not take the place of face-to-face interaction and the dialogue that can occur in smaller groups.

**Research question two.** Through interviews, observations, and artifacts, the data collected provided answers to the second research question, "What specific behaviors of school leaders inspire a shared vision?" Inspiring a shared vision requires school leaders to look for opportunities for growth and to collaborate on the development and promotion of the vision. The themes vision and foundations of school culture/climate relate to Kouzes and Posner's (2012) second tenet as the vision and culture relate to the shared work of the organization. Regular reminders of the purpose of the work, creation of a safe and welcoming climate to foster collaboration, and clear communication of expectations lead to inspiring a shared vision.

***Identify the purpose for the work and remind people regularly.*** Clearly articulated and visible throughout the middle schools is the focus on students. From the "Every Student Every Day" logo at Silvan Middle School to the attitudes of administrators, teachers, staff, and parents in both schools, everyone knows that all work done and all decisions made need to be for the benefit of the students. Jaclyn said, "Everybody is clued in to what the game plan is, and the

game plan is keep our kids safe, keep our kids upwardly mobile, keep our kids excited about why they're here." Mary agreed, "The school is students first. Everybody puts the students first. The school is very, um, nurturing and accommodating."

The focus is on students, whether this is tied to the PBIS systems for behavior implemented at both schools, the academic focus on student learning, or students' social development. Melissa stated, "We just want every kid to be as successful as they can, as they can personally be . . . on their timeframe, too . . . however long it takes you to get there, we'll get you there." School members feel a very real commitment to their students. Brenda shared, "I'm very much an advocate for the kids that I work with . . . everyone wants the best for kids."

***Make people feel safe and welcome.*** Important to making people feel safe and welcome are the people who are positioned at the entrance of each school. At Montem Middle School, visitors enter into a vestibule where a staff member welcomes all visitors, establishes the purpose of the visit, and checks identification. At Silvan Middle School, visitors enter directly into the main office, where the office staff welcomes all visitors, establishes the purpose of the visit, and checks identification. Each situation has advantages and disadvantages, but the primary purpose of the system is clear: maintain a safe environment for all by monitoring who enters and exits the building and do so in a way that makes visitors feel welcome. In my observations at both schools, staff members were welcoming and friendly, even at the busiest times of day.

In addition to the practices and behaviors of school personnel, policies exist within the district and the school for the purpose of keeping students safe and feeling welcome, and each building has committees that are focused on student safety and wellness. The district has both anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, and each school has anti-bullying and safety committees to ensure that these policies are followed. As part of each ROAR program, anti-

bullying and safety are explicitly taught through small group instruction. Posters throughout the school show students what bullying looks like and what options they have if they are being bullied or see someone else being bullied. Recently, the school district adopted the Safe2Say program, which provides a way for anyone to make a report of something of concern. This information is posted throughout the school and on the schools' websites.

*Make expectations clear and engage all stakeholders in the process.* Both middle schools have committed to a PBIS framework for the operation of their schools. "At the heart of the PBIS framework is data-driven decision-making and research-based practices geared to reduce and prevent problem behavior that interferes with student learning" (Schreiber-Bonsell & Beam, 2017). The PBIS program at Montem Middle School was developed by a team of teachers, students, and parents, is reviewed annually, and updated or adjusted as needed. Eric noted the importance of involving representatives from each stakeholder group and said, "With our ROAR, our teachers are the ones who created it . . . [parents] were part of the ROAR when it first started . . . students are always a part of that, too." MMS, in addition to providing expectations for students, has also created and publicized expectations for teachers. Aaron stated, "I'm really passionate about Schoolwide. It's good for kids, especially 11–14-year-olds, and when it's done well, it creates consistency, and it creates a safe place for kids." A PBIS framework allows for consistent communication of expectations and the follow-through with rewards and consequences.

**Research question three.** Interviews and observations provided data to answer the third research question, "What specific behaviors of school leaders challenge the process?" In order to challenge the process, stakeholders need to feel comfortable in experimenting with new ideas and looking for ways to improve. Opportunities for providing input, including offering ideas,

solutions, and suggestions, and having someone truly listen are leadership behaviors that connect to the ability of stakeholders to challenge the process and relate to the themes listening and problem-solving.

***Provide opportunities to give input.*** All four administrators discussed the importance of an open-door policy. Teachers, staff, and parents alike feel comfortable approaching the principals with ideas and suggestions. Tim stated,

I love opportunities that teachers have to share their individual perspectives, how things and changes, because we know we have a lot of changes every year, how changes affect them, positively, how they affect people negatively. Our administrators have done a pretty darn good job of allowing the different teachers in our building the opportunity to share out.

Tim recognizes that if teachers and staff share and project the same sentiment, there may be a unified stance or catalyst for change; on the other hand, if teachers and staff do not share his thoughts, if he “hates something and seven other people love it,” he recognizes his need to reconsider and get on board.

While teachers and staff feel comfortable approaching administrators, administrators also feel comfortable running an idea by a staff member before moving forward with it. Melissa shared, “With administration, they have an open-door policy, and it’s just kind of, ‘hey, you’re in the office. Come in here for a minute. Let me run this by you.’” The two-way communication encourages the sharing of ideas and challenging the norm.

Another way in which stakeholders can offer input is through district level committee work and survey participation. Tim said, “I get myself on a committee where I have the opportunity to speak my mind as much as possible . . . we’re fortunate to be in a district [where]

we form committees to give teachers input.” Brenda talked about providing input through surveys: “Occasionally, we get a survey asking us questions about things. We fill them in online, [in a] Google form.” Gathering stakeholder input and developing the trust necessary for stakeholders to share their ideas (which will be further discussed later in this chapter) remains important for challenging the process.

*Listen and respond rather than react.* The behavior of listening surfaced often in conversations with participants, not necessarily because people felt that being heard meant that their thoughts needed to be acted upon, but because people felt that someone listening and trying to understand their perspective made them feel valued. Beverly said, “I think to be a good leader . . . you have to be a good listener. I think you have to value other people’s opinions, and listen thoroughly to them and show that you care.” From an administrative perspective, Linda agreed that taking the time to listen and make people feel comfortable bringing thoughts forward is important, and especially when what is being said is not pleasant to hear, it is important not to react. Linda said,

I have an open-door policy. People will stop in, “Hey, can you consider this?” or “How do we want to handle this?” . . . you don’t stop trying to make people feel that it is safe to disagree or bring something contrary to what you thought you were going to do . . . people giving input . . . always being receptive to that and not being defensive or just understanding that multiple perspectives can make things stronger and better.

Linda understands the value of collective agency in carrying out the work of the building and the variety of perspectives gained by the professional contributions of all.

Going along with listening is an awareness of when to speak and what needs to be said. Barbara discussed the need to carefully consider when she speaks, so that when she does, she is

more likely to be heard. She said, “Really think hard before you speak. You don’t always have to be the first one to speak. You don’t always have to speak at every meeting. ‘Does this need to be said? Has someone else already said this?’” She tries to model this among her colleagues in an effort to be a voice that is part of solving problems rather than contributing to a negative message.

*Value ideas and solutions.* Beyond listening is truly valuing ideas that are brought forward and encouraging stakeholders to share solutions. Linda shared that Silvan Middle School is a “no quack zone.” What this means is that if staff members are going to complain or “quack” about something, they must also be willing or prepared to offer a solution to the problem. The point, Linda said, is to “take that [complaining] away, and like ok, that might be an issue, but how can we make this better?” The teacher and staff leaders who stepped forward as participants were people who identified themselves as problem-solvers, people who wanted to be part of the solution. Barbara said,

I try to be part of the solution. I will be the first to complain about things when it’s our team, and we’ve let our hair down, and I think people know about me that I’m also just as willing to dive in and brainstorm what we can try and then try it.

She feels that problem-solving and serving others is part of her role. “[A leader] maintains positivity and a service attitude. That’s my job, to serve anybody who calls me or needs me, or emails me, and help them in any way that I can.”

Mary advocates for restorative practices as a way to help people become solution-oriented, and not just administrators, teachers, and staff, but students as well. For example, when students have a problem with each other, rather than the adults instructing them to apologize to each other, “you should say sorry, you should say this,” it puts the onus on the students to figure

out what they think needs to be done in order to move past the issue. For adults, restorative practices can help build relationships so that when something does happen, it is easier to move forward. It encourages people to focus on “team-building and problem-solving” rather than “having a meeting after the meeting or venting too much at a meeting,” which can be counterproductive.

The teachers and staff in general displayed an attitude of always working toward improvement. In response to a question asking Melissa how she became respected as a leader in her building, she said, “I open my mouth!” She is always offering to help and looking for solutions and said, “How can we get that obstacle out of our way so that this can happen? I’m just always willing to do what it takes to make this place a better place.”

*Share in the decision-making process.* When asked to describe the leadership structure at each middle school, the overarching theme was that the district as a whole has moved toward a more top-down model, but there is greater balance within each middle school in terms of shared decision-making. The head principals of each building are recognized as the ultimate decision-maker within the building, and it is also recognized that the head principals receive directives from central office administration. However, the committee/team structure within each building gives teachers and staff an avenue for input and the ability to share in leadership and decision-making. Craig said, “I love how decisions are made, it’s really a collective group, so when we make a decision, we may not all agree on it, but it’s what we feel at that time is what’s best for kids.” Barbara agreed that “the leadership in this building would say that they like to involve other people and help make decisions together rather than just makes the decisions and um, dole them out”; however, she sometimes felt that administration erred too far on the side of shared decision-making, which affected follow-through. Lisa said, “I think there’s a balance in our

administration between if they need to make changes they do, but then in other ways, they would consider our opinions.” Shared decision-making connects to the previous behaviors of listening and valuing solutions. Teachers and staff largely appreciated the balance of decisions being made from the top versus being arrived at by consensus. Tim summed it up well when he said, “I love when our administrators let us have a voice . . . I think we have a good balance in the two administrators at [MMS]. It’s a good balance, yea.”

***Take risks by trying new things.*** Taking risks and trying new things in the classroom is part of challenging the process and progressing the organization forward, and it also connects significantly to trust. Administrators need to recognize the importance of encouraging risk-taking and learning from failures. Melissa said, “I’m not afraid to take charge and try something and to, you know, roll with it . . . I actually think doing things different and trying something new is encouraged here.” Melissa added that not fearing failure goes along with trying new things. She emphasized the importance of “an openness to new ideas, and I think an openness to failure . . . it’s okay to try something and not be successful . . . we all fail at some point, and how can we learn from it?” Brenda agreed, “You try new approaches with kids all the time. Sometimes they work, and sometimes they don’t . . . I’m pretty comfortable with that.” In order for teachers and staff to feel comfortable taking risks and trying new things, Linda recognizes the importance of establishing that culture and

creating that positive climate [and] allowing people to know that when I seriously tell them to take risks in your classroom, and if it bombs when I’m in there for an observation, it’s not a gotcha. I’ll come back another day, and I’ll hear people saying that to each other. Like, hey, it’s okay...it’s not a gotcha thing for observations. So I like that

people are willing to take risks, and it's when I hear that amongst everybody else, knowing that it's sticking.

Part of creating that culture is establishing and demonstrating trust, which emerged as a significant behavior in response to the fourth research question.

**Research question four.** Interview responses, with data corroborated among the interviewees, contributed to the results of the fourth research question, “What specific behaviors of school leaders enable others to act?” The themes of establishing relationships and building leaders aligned with Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) fourth tenet of enabling others to act. Behaviors related to trust, collaboration, leadership opportunities, and access emerged as significant to enabling others to act, which positively influences a school’s culture.

***Demonstrate and build trust.*** Trust surfaced as a significant factor among teachers, staff, and parents in willingness to step forward as leaders, to contribute ideas, and to try new things. Linda said of her faculty and staff, “I believe in teacher leadership, and everybody’s a leader and cultivating that and making sure people know, ‘I trust your decision-making as a professional.’” Melissa’s thoughts affirmed Linda’s response as she said, “I think the trust from administration that, yes, we know you are handling it . . . you’re taking care of it and doing what’s best for kids.” This explicit demonstration of trust connects back to the shared vision and understanding that the purpose of the work, the focus of every day, is the students.

As further confirmation that professional trust is present, teachers’ responses during interviews to the question of what they need to do if they want to try something new in their classrooms was overwhelmingly positive. Beverly shared, “I think our administration is super flexible, and they allow us to be a professional and to run our classroom however we feel is good for our students. . . . I think they just trust us completely.” Tim agreed that the administration

has a “let me know what you need [but] hands off” attitude toward teachers’ professional responsibilities. Administrators are there to provide support when needed but otherwise value teacher expertise in instructional practice. This trust goes beyond teachers to staff as well, and there is an overarching understanding that everyone works in the best interest of students.

Brenda said, “I’ve been given a lot of leeway, um, so I’m pretty comfortable with the teachers that I work with, and if I see something that would work, sometimes I ask, and sometimes I just try it.”

It is also important to recognize that trust goes both ways. Craig acknowledged that in order to work toward a shared vision and enable others to act, “You need them to trust you; they need to know that they can count on you in situations, and you’ll be there for them.” Barbara acknowledged,

If a parent goes to one of our administrators, they really do back us for the most part and send the parent back to us. “Have you spoken with the teacher yet? If not, you really need to go to the teacher first [or] we can all sit down and talk together if you’d like to.”

Supporting teachers and working with teachers in situations involving student and parent concerns helps to build trust between faculty and administration.

***Provide leadership opportunities.*** Trust and opportunities for leadership go hand in hand. One way to demonstrate trust in the professional abilities of others is to provide the opportunity for others to lead and then get out of their way. Both Montem and Silvan Middle Schools have committees that are tasked with carrying out initiatives of the school, such as their respective ROAR programs, anti-bullying, reading, health and wellness, and diversity initiatives. Craig shared, “It’s quite interesting, when you have a group that’s been together, and boy, they’re spot on with everything, and they know what to do, and the time of year when things

need to be done.” Whether the committee leaders are formally appointed by administration or emerge as leaders organically through the committee work, the committee process contributes to shared leadership throughout the school and the overall effectiveness of the school.

In addition to committee leaders, each school has team leaders. The team leaders meet regularly with administration and serve as liaisons between the team and the administration. Through this structure, the team leaders provide input, in Craig’s words, “more of a[n advisory] council” for logistics of running the building, and then team leaders report back to their teams. The teams focus on what is being done, why it is being done, and how it can be done better in the best interest of students.

In addition to providing informal leadership roles, teachers are also supported in pursuing formal leadership roles. Aaron said, “When I was a teacher at Silvan Middle School, I was blessed to have an administrator who gave me a lot of leadership roles early on, and I really liked the ability to affect change beyond my classroom.” Now as an administrator himself, he recognizes the importance of empowering others to lead: “

The job of a leader is to cultivate new leaders, too, so finding people who have real strengths, skill sets . . . and I think that goes a long way in making people feel valued and like they’re contributing to the team.

This sentiment was echoed by Lisa who shared,

Having all of the little things noticed, that would lead to asking me if I would be a committee leader, I felt really trusted by them asking me that . . . being recognized that I care, and that they trusted me that I would be responsible enough to get it done and carry it through throughout the year.

Enabling others to lead builds trust and makes people feel valued, and building trust and making people feel valued enables them to lead and builds capacity within the school.

***Support opportunities for collaboration.*** Teachers' responses in particular demonstrated the importance of collaboration, teaming, and professional learning communities (PLCs) in contributing to a positive school culture. Parent responses also demonstrated an appreciation for teaming and the support it provided for their students. Montem and Silvan Middle Schools both have team structures and PLCs. The teams are structured around shared students and allow teachers of the same group of students to work together to meet the needs of each student. PLCs, on the other hand, are structured based on teachers who teach in the same content areas and allow for shared planning, instructional strategies, and use of student assessment data to inform instruction. Both serve to enable teachers to meet students' needs and build trust and leadership as well as camaraderie among faculty. Several teachers cited the team as their work family and credited team support for the ability to take risks in trying new things in the classroom.

The camaraderie brought about by the team structure cannot be undervalued. Both Barbara and Melissa discussed the family-like nature of the team. Barbara revealed,

If we have a sense of family, it's on my team. I would do anything for my team. I love my team, and my team has changed up through the years, but every single person that comes onto this team is somebody that we all just fall in love with again.

Melissa echoed her thoughts and said, "I just think I've been very fortunate to be put on, and hired on a team that we've grown together and grown as a family, too." The support that the team provides to each other both personally and professionally has a significant impact on the climate and culture of the building.

From the parent perspective, Jaclyn credits the team structure for eliminating the size of the school as a barrier to building relationships. While she was initially concerned that her student would get lost in the shuffle, she found that not to be the case. “And I think one of the big reasons why is the team structure. And that really giving that – these are your people – even though you have 800 people here, this is yours.” Students know the adults in the building with whom they can connect and by whom they are known, which is an intentional part of teaming and the ROAR programs.

In addition to the practical purposes of the team structure in Montem and Silvan Middle Schools, there is also the abstract idea of being on a team that surfaced in many conversations. Craig referred to the “team effort” of leading the building and the ability of stakeholders to provide input and share in the decision-making. Jaclyn talked about her “role on the team,” as someone who works with administration, faculty, parents, and students in order to be a supportive presence in the school and for her child.

Through PLCs, teachers have another avenue for collaboration. PLCs are structured around teachers of the same content area and give teachers a regular opportunity to share new ideas for the classroom with same-subject colleagues. Lisa said, “We’re involved in PLCs . . . I like bouncing ideas off of those two teachers in particular . . . to maybe grow my idea or look at it from a different way before implementing it.” Barbara also shared that she was very comfortable trying new things, especially considering the support of her colleagues. “A lot of times, it is talked about in our PLC so multiple times we are doing it, several of us are doing it.” Tim agreed that planning with a colleague helps with trying something new in the classroom. “If I want to try something new in my classroom, I do it. . . . I’m already talking and planning it with someone else . . . so there’s a bit of a check and a balance.” According to Tim, this helps with

administrative accountability as well because “that’s something that our administrators really support . . . there’s a bit of a buffer before it would reach them. These teachers are working together, and they’ve thought through this rather than one single person trying to plan something.”

Although administrators check in with PLC groups, they are not there to manage them.

Regarding visiting PLCs, Eric said,

I set the stage with them saying, you know, I’m going to come in, and I’m going to sit there, and you just continue, and I’m there if you want me to help, but I’m not going to be interjecting unless you really want me to. But I’m there to help and support you whatever you need.

Aaron added, “We don’t come into team meetings, we don’t come into PLCs unless they really know we are coming. We just want people to know that we trust what’s going on behind closed doors.” The purpose of joining the PLCs is to offer support rather than to check in, and teachers know it. Lisa said, “I feel very trusted as a professional to do what I need to do when I need to do it.”

***Provide access.*** In order to enable others to step forward and lead, there must be clear communication and an ability to share information. This occurs for different stakeholders in different ways.

From Bill’s perspective, “the best thing to do is to know what’s happening and to also have ideas.” For him, “the avenue is through your kid.” That could mean being involved with team or club sports, music, or drama. Bill cites parental involvement as a real positive for the culture of the school district. Jaclyn wants to make it as easy as possible for parents to be

involved. She helps to maintain the PTSO Facebook page for MMS. In order to encourage other parents to participate, Jaclyn goes the extra mile:

Do you need a ride? Would you like to carpool? Can I take you for coffee afterwards? Can we build that relationship so you can see how awesome this is? . . . I think ease of access is a big thing . . . so I definitely encourage with the ease of access and the information.

In regards to sharing information, Jaclyn wants people to be able to stay connected, even if they cannot always show up in person. She said,

I took a ton of live video this year at [name of activity], we immediately post our meeting notes on Facebook and email them out to parents because you can't always get there, but I want you to not feel punished for not being able to get there. I keep you in the loop so that seamlessly you can step in and say, "Okay, I wasn't here last month, but I know exactly what's going on today . . . and I can volunteer for this."

Parents who feel empowered and welcomed to participate in their students' education can contribute significantly to a school's culture. This level of engagement builds a bridge between home and school that has the potential for positive impact on students.

**Research question five.** Through interviews, artifacts, and observations, I developed the response to the fifth and final research question, "What specific behaviors of school leaders encourage the heart?" Aaron recognizes that showing appreciation happens in a variety of ways and said,

I'm a big believer in the handwritten note. People never tire of thanks. And you gotta know how people like to be thanked. Some people love having their name in an email. Other people like a handwritten note, other people like just the pat on the back, or the

text, or whatever it is. It's really knowing your staff, but I'm a big fan of our staff ROAR tickets as well.

The fifth practice of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) theory, "Encourage the Heart" aligns with the theme of appreciation. For leaders to be able to encourage the heart by recognizing individual contributions and celebrating victories, leaders must take the time to develop relationships with individuals and understand how individuals prefer to be appreciated and recognized for their work. In addition, leaders must be specific in order for expressions of gratitude to be meaningful and effective.

***Handwrite thank you notes.*** Several interviewees identified handwritten notes as a way in which they enjoy being thanked or enjoy thanking others. Eric shared, "We also do some handwritten notes to our staff, if something went above and beyond, we'll do that, too." Lisa confirmed that "both Aaron and Eric have written me [cards] and stuck them in my mailbox for different little things, and that made me feel really, really good."

Handwritten notes also serve as a way to communicate about the emotional aspects of teaching. Barbara expressed that the current teacher evaluation system leaves no room for including any feeling or emotion, so Linda will often write a note to express the emotional things that she noticed in an observation, such as, "I loved when I looked around the room, I could tell the kids were really enjoying the class." Barbara felt that this was a genuine way to share the aspects of an observation that cannot be recorded in the formal evaluation.

***Celebrate people via systems of acknowledgment.*** Both middle schools have a systematic method of recognizing teachers similar to how they recognize students within their PBIS programs. Eric stated, "We have within our ROAR program, we have teacher recognition, so they do a paw like they would do for a student, and then we do monthly drawings for our

staff.” Teachers, staff, and administrators, through the ROAR program, acknowledge students’ positive behaviors by writing a note on a paw-shaped paper. Teachers and staff can be recognized in the same way. Colleagues can recognize each other or students can recognize their teachers by filling out ROAR paws and submitting them to a monthly drawing. At each faculty meeting, three to five faculty and staff names are drawn, the note on their paw is read aloud, and they receive a prize. Winners may receive prizes such as a gift card, donuts, or free lunch. Then all of the paws are distributed to the teachers and staff who were acknowledged, and they are able to read what their colleagues and students had to say about them.

In addition, the Silvan Middle School principal sends out a weekly email in which she highlights the faculty and staff who have gone above and beyond. Linda said,

So anybody who tried something new, or somebody, a para that maybe created a bulletin board, or this team had this field trip, or this teacher won this award, so every Friday, I’ll send out this weekly kudos to recognize all the great things going on, and it’s usually pretty big, because you know, you don’t have to win an award to get a kudos. You can do anything, that’s even trying something new in your classroom.

This is a way to celebrate publicly things that are happening in the school, and knowing that trying new things is celebrated, faculty and staff may feel encouraged to take risks in their classrooms. However, this gesture is met with mixed reviews, which speaks to the importance of knowing how people like to be celebrated. Barbara stated,

I like [it] in a lot of ways, because it does kind of highlight what people are doing above and beyond what they’re doing in their classroom, but what’s hard about that is, there are a lot of teachers in this building who never show up in the weekly kudos because they’re pouring their heart and soul into every interaction that goes on in that classroom.

The fact that people are acknowledged for going above and beyond their duties has merit, but there are those who are doing their job really well and may not be recognized. Craig echoed that “sometimes people get missed when you start listing things and who did what.” For that reason, he often prefers “going to someone directly and saying, ‘hey, thanks.’”

***Prioritize face-to-face communication.*** Acknowledging someone in the moment is a powerful way to encourage the heart as well. Lisa discussed that while she likes to give and receive ROAR paw notes, sometimes she tries to “let people know right on the spot that ‘I never thought of that; that’s a good job,’ [or] ‘hey, that’s a really good idea.’” Mary also emphasized the importance of acknowledging people in the moment.

I do try to tell them in the moment, when a thought crosses my mind. “I thought that lesson was really cool.” Sometimes I’ll email because I know people like that, too, because it’s permanent, you know. And sometimes, I’ll even copy the administrator because I want them to know, too.

***Share acknowledgments with others.*** In a profession where much of what faculty and staff do is not observed by other adults, sharing praise, acknowledgment, and appreciation makes people feel valued. As Mary shared, copying an administrator on an email so that a record exists of something that you did that may not have been witnessed by anyone else, can make people feel valued. Tim expressed that he does not care so much about the notes,

but any time an administrator says a subtle “thank you,” I appreciate it, or the fact that it gets back to you that your principals said something kind to you or about you, in the face of other people . . . I think our principals . . . are very conscientious of the power that has. Knowing that your work is valued enough for your efforts to be commended in the presence of others has the potential to positively impact a school’s climate and culture.

***Respect people's time.*** Both administrators and faculty emphasized the importance of respecting people's time. Eric made a point of letting me know that "we respect people's time" when I was making plans to do meeting observations. Mary echoed this sentiment and said, "They are respectful of people's time," both in the sense of not wasting people's time but also in making a point to be present for teachers, staff, and students, even when they are busy.

In both buildings, the focus of meeting time has shifted from disseminating information to providing meaningful professional development. Lisa said, "Faculty meetings are always well-structured and meaningful," and Melissa said, "We do a lot more professional development at our faculty meetings now."

Aaron emphasized the importance of a work-life balance and respecting people's time at work and away from work.

I think, in the world we live in today, to value people's time, but also to value, value people's time when they are at school, but also to value people's time when they're not at school. We're more connected than we've ever been, but we're also more disconnected than we've ever been. And I think it's important for people to recognize that whenever they're home, they should be home. And emails don't need to be responded to at all hours of the day.

Whether through using meeting time well, being present, or encouraging others to maintain a healthy work-life balance, respecting people's time from both a professional and personal viewpoint, makes people feel appreciated and valued.

***Summary of expressions of gratitude.*** Several specific ways of thanking people were identified through data collection, and it is clear that connecting the specific way of demonstrating appreciation to a person's preferred way of being appreciated is important to the

effectiveness of encouraging the heart. In addition to knowing how a person prefers to be thanked, it is key to be specific in thanking him or her. This presents a significant challenge in working with a large organization or staff. Leaders often thank people organization wide, or provide all staff with a celebratory cake, but in order for people to feel truly valued, appreciation and recognition needs to be specific to what an individual has done.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided the results of my research, which examined leadership behaviors that positively influence a school's culture. These results were obtained through careful examination of data provided through observations, artifacts, and interviews. Interview participants were comprised of administrators, teachers, staff members, and parents who assumed formal and informal leadership roles within each school.

Each of the five research questions contributed to the central research question, "How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?" In addition, each of the five research questions connected to the five tenets of the leadership theory that served as the theoretical framework for this study. In response to each of the five research questions, I identified four to five specific leadership behaviors that contribute positively to a school's culture. These leadership behaviors provide theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for schools in addition to prompting considerations for future research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the specific behaviors of school leaders that contribute to a positive school culture. In this chapter, I will present a summary of the research findings, followed by a discussion of the findings and the implications as they relate to the literature and theoretical framework. In addition, I will discuss the implications from methodological and practical perspectives. Finally, I will discuss the delimitations and limitations of this study and recommendations for future research that resulted from this study.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this multiple-case study demonstrated the importance of leadership behaviors in contributing positively to a school's culture. These findings also demonstrated that leadership comes from a variety of stakeholders in both formal and informal leadership roles. By involving a variety of stakeholders in this study, participant responses both added to the list of specific behaviors and confirmed the leadership behaviors of others. From the data collected, I identified four to five specific leadership behaviors in response to each research question connected to the aspects of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory.

In response to the first research question, specific leadership behaviors included administrators being visible and engaged in the day-to-day operations of the school, interacting purposefully with others to build relationships, learning continuously, making values visible, and communicating expectations clearly and by example. In response to the second research question, specific behaviors included identifying the purpose of the work and reminding people regularly, making people feel safe and welcome, making expectations clear, and involving all stakeholders in the process. The leadership behaviors identified in response to the third research

question involved providing stakeholders opportunities to give input, listening and responding rather than reacting, valuing ideas and solutions, allowing for shared decision-making, and taking risks and trying new things. The responses to the fourth research question consisted of demonstrating and building trust, providing leadership opportunities, supporting opportunities for collaboration, and providing access. Responses to the fifth and final research question included handwriting thank you notes, celebrating people through systems of acknowledgement, communicating face-to-face, sharing acknowledgments with others, and respecting others' time.

### **Discussion**

In this section, I will discuss the ways in which the findings of this research confirm previous quantitative research regarding the connection between school leadership and school culture. In addition, the empirical evidence gathered in this study contributes to the body of research around school culture as demonstrated through a variety of leadership roles and behaviors. Finally, this research extends Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory by its application to an educational setting.

### **Empirical**

This study addressed a gap in the literature, which lacked qualitative research regarding school culture and connections to school leadership (Turan & Bektas, 2013). Further, this study addressed middle schools specifically, a group often overlooked with primary schools and high schools receiving more attention as shown throughout the review of the literature, which was the focus of Chapter Two. The findings of this study both confirm and contribute to previous research around the topic of school culture and the leadership behaviors that influence a positive school culture.

**School culture.** The results of this study confirm the significance of the connection between school leaders and school culture (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Huguet, 2017; McKinney et al., 2015; Rai & Prakash, 2014) and emphasize that the term *school leader* does not only refer to principals and administrators. School leaders in this study were represented by teachers, counselors, paraeducators, and parents in addition to school principals and assistant principals.

**Positive attitude.** Several interview participants indicated that they felt a responsibility to be role models and maintain a positive attitude. Lisa said, “I try to . . . present another side when comments are made, like negative comments . . . so when I can, I do try to speak up and give them something else to think about or put a positive spin on it.” Beverly also felt that “trying to be positive, and trying to be appreciative and grateful, and you know, saying hello and goodbye and smiling at people, I just think trying to be positive no matter what” was an important contribution to a school’s culture. It is up to the leaders in a building to consistently model the positive interactions that contribute to a positive school culture, and those who promote positivity within the organization often naturally rise to leadership.

**Solution-oriented.** School leaders also felt a responsibility to contribute to a positive school culture through being solution-oriented. Mary said,

When we can be problem-solvers, I think that does help . . . I was noticing myself after the holiday break [having] less ability to fend off, like, the tendency to just complain . . . so then I thought, no, that doesn’t help anybody if I can’t find a way . . . so I keep learning and trying new ways.

Barbara and Melissa also focused a lot on being problem-solvers and jumping in with a group of people to find solutions to make a situation better or to remove obstacles to provide what they believe is best for students. Individuals who demonstrate this attitude and initiative naturally rise

as leaders, whether recognized by a formal title or informally as a go-to person for their colleagues.

***School safety.*** School safety, including physical and emotional safety, also contributes significantly to a school's culture and climate (Kaffemanienè et al., 2017; Kohl et al., 2013; Sebastian et al., 2016). In an age where school violence and bullying, which is no longer limited to the school building or school day because of social media, etc., has become a national concern, school leaders make great efforts to ensure the safety of the school community. Both middle schools had safety committees that work throughout the school year to continuously evaluate and implement practices to create a safe environment. Both schools had posters and bulletin boards throughout the buildings to make clear the schools' stance against bullying and to promote diversity and acceptance. Within the buildings and on their websites, both schools had posted information about what students should do if they see something that makes them feel unsafe or concerned about the safety of someone else. In addition, both schools have implemented a program of instruction for creating a safe school through Schoolwide Positive Behavior.

**Program of interventions and support.** The implementation of SWPBIS programs has often been studied in terms of student outcomes and effectiveness; however, a connection may also exist between SWPBIS programs and school culture. While further exploration is necessary, both middle schools included in this study utilized SWPBIS programs to manage behavioral expectations and consequences. In addition, the systems of rewards and recognitions were in place for both students and faculty/staff. As a significant part of the school vision and identity for both Montem and Silvan Middle Schools, the ROAR programs' expectations of behavior, including responsibility/respect, organization, attitude, respect/responsibility, indicate

the school climate and the school's cultural values. SWPBIS programs are supported by the United States Department of Education and mandated at various levels (elementary, middle, and/or high school) in some states (PBIS, 2017). The prevalence of such programs and the potential impact on school culture and student achievement warrants further consideration.

One of the main struggles reported with SWPBIS programs is the sustainability of the programs (Schreiber-Bonsell & Beam, 2017). Craig indicated that in their fourth year of the program, Silvan Middle School already foresees this challenge. He said, "It's a lot of work . . . and not only when you get there, but maintaining it, sustainability has been the most difficult thing . . . coming up with new rewards and [reaching] that middle group." It is important to maintain the consistency of expectations and consequences that is a hallmark of the program while also keeping it fresh and meaningful for all students.

**Visibility and engagement.** Visibility and engagement within the school emerged as a significant factor in the culture of Montem and Silvan Middle Schools. In the state of Pennsylvania, teachers and staff are on a rotating observation cycle, and the number of times that an administrator is required to be in the classroom of a tenured teacher is minimal. Even with a small number of formal observations required, the evaluation process can be a challenge for principals who wear many hats and are part of many building and district meetings. However, there is great value in administrative presence in areas frequented by students, such as classrooms, hallways, and common areas (cafeteria, library, etc.). Craig understood the importance of being out of his office and interacting with students and felt that eating lunch in the cafeteria everyday was one way to be visible to students, teachers, and staff. This not only helps with student behavior but also provides support to the teachers and staff who are responsible for monitoring areas such as the cafeteria. Barbara discussed the importance of

being visible and engaged as essential to running the building, “because if you don’t know what’s going on, you really can’t be a leader in that building.” Administrative visibility and engagement in addition to spending time in classrooms demonstrates the leadership and support for teachers, staff, and students that contributes significantly to a school’s culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). It is also essential to building meaningful relationships with teachers, staff, and students.

**Professional development.** Professional development also surfaced throughout interviews as an important aspect of the school cultures at Montem and Silvan Middle Schools and was identified as a factor in teacher effectiveness and self-efficacy, which contributes to a positive school culture (Louis & Lee, 2016). Professional development can include experiences provided by external groups such as conferences, workshops, guest speakers, and webinars, or professional development can be delivered by the experts within the school community. This continuous learning is valued by all stakeholders. Mary said, “That’s another thing I do. I go to a lot of workshops, conferences, webinars . . . so I keep learning.” Mary also discussed the overall “high level of professionalism” of the school and indicated that continuous learning was the norm, including “people doing workshops and professional development outside their day . . . [and] talking about new initiatives and new things that they’ve learned.” Several other interview participants, including principals, teachers, and staff, also discussed the abundant and district-supported opportunities to participate in professional development.

**Trust and collaboration.** Through this study, trust and collaboration were identified as essential factors in enabling others to act. Trust was identified as a significant factor related to school culture and as a necessary ingredient for working together for the success of students (Demir, 2015; Erdogan, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011), and the

importance of trust was confirmed through each of the stakeholder interviews. Interview participants, who serve as administrators, frequently commented about trusting teachers and staff and wanting teachers and staff to know that they are trusted professionals. Teacher and staff interview participants regularly shared that they felt trusted as professionals and were encouraged to take risks and share ideas. This strong foundation of trust allows administrators to grow new leaders and build capacity within the school, which in turn influences teacher efficacy and has a positive impact on student achievement (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Demir, 2015).

Trust is also demonstrated through consistency and follow-through (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016). The middle schools represented in this study incorporated SWPBIS programs, which enable schools to provide clear expectations and consistent consequences. Craig discussed an important change that he had made this year in adjusting the way he follows through with teachers regarding disciplinary incidents. While expectations and consequences are made clear through the PBIS model, with expectations posted in a variety of places throughout the school and on the school's website, Craig recognized that "closing the loop" of communication with all involved in a situation made a difference in establishing and maintaining trust.

Collaboration among faculty and staff, like trust, helps to build teacher efficacy and effectiveness (Louis & Lee, 2016; Ohlson et al., 2016). Through teaming, PLCs, and committee work, teachers and staff have opportunities, most of which are built into their school day, to work together around student concerns, instructional planning, or other initiatives, which all relate back to student success. This level of collaboration also motivates teachers, builds relationships, and provides accountability in a meaningful way. Tim shared that

so much of what we do with the teaming, the accountability comes from your colleagues. Um, boy if [teacher name] is doing something in English class that's pretty awesome, there's no chance that I'm going to skimp on my lesson, you know. It's . . . not competitive . . . but it's, I want to give the kids what every other teacher is giving them. So if the bar is set high, I get that from my colleagues.

Breaking the mold of what has historically been a job carried out in isolation from colleagues, opportunities for collaboration benefit the overall school culture, and specifically, teacher practice and student success (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016). Collaboration also contributes to relationship building and the camaraderie that reflects a more positive school climate.

**Leadership opportunities and shared decision-making.** A collaborative leadership model, in which administrators and other school personnel work together to progress the organization, provides another opportunity to positively impact school culture (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Wan et al., 2018). Parents, teachers, and staff alike, whether leading formally or informally, felt empowered and valued as leaders within the school. Empowering teacher leaders contributes to a positive school culture, which in turn influences teacher self-efficacy (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; You et al., 2017). Lisa expressed that when asked to become a committee leader, she felt that all the little things she had done were noticed. “I like maybe being recognized that I care, and that they trust me that I would be responsible enough to get it done and carry it through throughout the year.” Another way to lead collaboratively is through shared decision-making and being open to stakeholder input. This eliminates what Brenda referred to as “us vs. them talk.” Interview participants identified several avenues through which they were able to provide input, whether in

a faculty meeting setting, by taking advantage of administrative open-door policies, or by serving on a committee. These opportunities made participants feel like valued members of the school community.

**Expressions of gratitude and support.** Demonstrations of support and gratitude improve teacher and staff job satisfaction, which in turn, benefit school culture (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Lee & Li, 2015). Additionally, Kouzes and Posner (2012) stress the importance of being specific in communicating gratitude, celebrating others, and providing support. Handwritten notes or individually addressed emails, while requiring time and effort, made people feel valued and provided them with a written record of the sentiments expressed. Mary said, “Sometimes I’ll email because I know people like that, too, because it’s permanent . . . I do write the ROAR tickets, too.”

Both middle schools utilized ROAR paws as part of their SWPBIS programs as a system for recognizing individuals (both faculty and staff) for specific reasons. During a faculty meeting at Montem Middle School, teacher and staff names were drawn, the reason that they received the ROAR paw was read aloud, and then they received a prize of a dozen donuts. Those who did not win would receive their ROAR paw in their mailbox, so whether they win or not, they are aware of specifically what they had done that was appreciated or lauded.

### **Theoretical**

From a theoretical perspective, the results of this multiple case study extend the leadership theory developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012). The five tenets of leadership as set forth in the Leadership Challenge can be applied to the realm of education in much the same way as the business world; however, that is not to say that schools are like businesses and can be treated as such. Schools and businesses vary greatly because of the presence of and focus on

students and student achievement within a school. In addition to students, parents and the community (who are taxpayers) represent stakeholder groups with an interest in the success of the school. Aside from the differences in stakeholder groups of the organization, the five practices of effective leaders as set forth in the Leadership Challenge transfer fittingly to a school setting.

**Model the way.** The themes expectations and values strongly connected to Kouzes and Posner's (2012) first practice of modeling the way, which requires leaders to act according to the values and vision of the school. Kouzes and Posner (2012) emphasize that a leader is not defined by certain characteristics or charisma; a leader becomes a leader because of actions and behaviors that align with an organization's vision and values. Linda recognized that "as a leader, people are going to look to you in how you're going to respond in every single situation." One of the most effective ways for school leaders to model the way is through their visible presence in student-focused areas of the school, such as classrooms and cafeterias, and their engagement with teachers, staff, parents, community members, and students. Interview participants' responses varied in terms of the level of administrative visibility within the school; however, it was clear that visibility is appreciated. Those who felt visibility was high expressed the value of seeing administrators frequently and the importance of visibility to relationships. Those who felt that the level of visibility could be improved perceived visibility as a valuable and necessary aspect of school leadership. Expanding the first practice of Kouzes and Posner's leadership theory includes understanding the operation of a school and the focus on students and student success.

**Inspire a shared vision.** The themes vision and foundations of culture/climate align with Kouzes and Posner's (2012) second tenet, inspiring a shared vision, which includes

imagining exciting possibilities and involving others to make the vision a reality. The vision goes hand-in-hand with the foundations of the culture/climate to determine what drives the organization and how stakeholders are an integral part of the work. The collaboration and committee work observed at both middle schools in this study demonstrate how schools can not only build capacity by using the expertise of all stakeholders, but also build engagement by sharing ownership. For example, both middle schools use SWPBIS programs to set behavioral expectations and rewards. Implementing SWPBIS programs with fidelity requires involving multiple stakeholder groups such as teachers, staff, students, and parents in the development process. When discussing the development of ROAR at Montem Middle School, Eric said, “With our ROAR, our teachers are the ones who created it . . . [parents] were part of the ROAR when it first started . . . students are always a part of that, too.” The application of Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) second tenet requires an understanding of who the stakeholders are in a school community and involving them in developing and sharing the school’s vision.

**Challenge the process.** The themes listening and problem-solving connect with challenging the process, which involves valuing input, problem-solvers, and risk-takers (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Several of those who stepped forward to participate in this study identified themselves as problem-solvers, and the characteristic of being problem-solvers seemed to propel them into leadership roles, whether formally or informally. Barbara, Melissa, Mary, and Tim all discussed their willingness to speak up, try new things, work to find solutions, eliminate obstacles, and help others to do the same. With Linda’s “no quack zone” expectation, the message was clear: input is welcome, and ideas for solutions are preferred. To incorporate the third tenet of the leadership theory, it is important to be sensitive to the scrutiny that teachers often undergo and to be intentional about supporting teachers in taking risks.

**Enable others to act.** The themes of relationships and building leadership align with the tenet, enabling others to act, and requires building trust and relationships in addition to fostering opportunities for collaboration and leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Teaching has historically been a rather isolated profession as teachers spend the majority of their time in their classrooms as solo teachers. Over the last decade, the importance of teacher collaboration and the structure of professional learning communities has become increasingly valued (DuFour et al., 2008). One of the main functions of a PLC is to review assessment data and teach or reteach students as necessary. In addition to the connection to student success, PLCs help to build teacher self-efficacy and effectiveness, which contribute to a positive school culture. Extending Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory to an educational setting requires purposeful attention to collaboration. While teachers still spend most of their time in their classrooms, purposefully building in collaborative time, as Montem and Silvan Middle Schools have, was highly valued.

**Encourage the heart.** The theme of appreciation aligns with the final tenet, encouraging the heart, which involves "recogniz[ing] contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence [and] celebrat[ing] the values and victories by creating a spirit of community" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 29). How this is accomplished may look very different in an educational or not-for-profit setting than it does in other organizations. Funding for such recognitions or celebrations is limited, if available at all, and usually requires individuals to contribute from their own pockets. Several teachers and staff commented regarding how they try to show appreciation in small ways such as, "I get them Starbucks" (Melissa), or "I'm pretty generous at Christmas-time" (Brenda), or "I brought a cheesecake and a card" (Beverly). In terms of whole school celebrations of successes, which usually revolve around student

achievement, many celebrations involve food, such as a cake for all of the faculty and staff.

According to Mary,

And sometimes they'll pull a surprise, and one year they got Rita's [Italian Ice] for everybody, and that was really fun. And they had a cookie party, where at a faculty meeting they brought in sugar cookies and frosting and silly stuff, but it was much appreciated.

In an educational setting, where resources for individual recognition and celebrations are limited, the offering of support becomes an extremely meaningful way to show gratitude (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016). Particularly from administrators, knowing that an administrator will support one in a challenging situation, "they really do back us for the most part" (Barbara), or that there is support for professional decision-making, "I think the trust from administration that, yes, we know you are handling it . . . we know you're taking care of it and doing what's best for kids" (Melissa) makes a difference. In addition, a generally supportive work environment influences job effectiveness and job satisfaction. Melissa shared, "We look forward to it [coming to school]. I do feel supported by my administration, my staff members, my colleagues, and my team." Moreover, it is important to recognize that every individual in the organization can contribute meaningfully to creating a supportive environment, and acknowledging the value of each person within the school builds community spirit.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify specific leadership behaviors that positively influence school culture. Examining specific behaviors of school leaders, both those with formally designated and informally held leadership roles, provided valuable explanations

for leadership that works for establishing a positive school culture. The findings of this research have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications to consider.

### **Theoretical**

From a theoretical perspective, the leadership behaviors identified through this study extend the leadership theory of Kouzes and Posner (2012) to address areas specific to education. While some aspects of the theory are transferable from businesses to schools, several aspects within Kouzes and Posner's five tenets work differently or require additional considerations in a school setting.

Kouzes and Posner's (2012) leadership theory could be utilized to provide professional development to school leaders at any level, including district wide or building specific, in terms of helping school leaders understand how their roles influence school culture. Carpenter (2015) has emphasized the importance of training leaders as they naturally emerge, and expanding Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices to include examples appropriate for an educational setting would provide a clear and consistent framework of understanding for all leaders within a school district.

Administrators may also want to consider using Kouzes and Posner's (2012) framework intentionally to affect change within the school's culture and to develop leaders within their staff. While many often feel the effects of a school's culture and climate, not everyone takes the time to consider the culture and climate and the impact that it has on various aspects of the school, including efficacy, job satisfaction, and ultimately student achievement. Using Kouzes and Posner's five practices may allow school leaders to explicitly define the culture and what needs to happen to make forward progress within the organization.

## **Empirical**

Many quantitative studies of school climate and culture, which have focused on the factors that contribute to a school's culture, have been conducted, but there is a gap in the literature for qualitative studies that answer the how and why questions related to leadership influences on school culture. This qualitative multiple case study addresses that gap and provides explanations and examples of how school leaders influence a positive school culture through the voices of a variety of stakeholders. This study confirmed the importance of school leadership in contributing to a positive school culture, and established the value not only of administrative leadership but also formal and informal leadership from other stakeholder groups (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Demir, 2015).

Recognizing the importance of teacher and staff leadership is vital to a positive school culture. Empowering others to lead connects with several other factors of school culture such as job satisfaction, retention, and self-efficacy, which all influence student achievement (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

## **Practical**

At a variety of leadership levels, the practices identified as a result of this study may provide foundations for professional development in leadership. Practitioners often struggle to embrace theoretical principles; therefore, the results of this study give real world, applicable examples to support the leadership theory developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012).

**Implications for administrators.** The specific behaviors identified in this study can be used by administrators in their own practice and in building leadership throughout their schools. Administrators who are newer to their roles may benefit from this list as a way to experiment with behaviors that might work for them and the teachers and staff they lead. It may provide a

toolbox of resources as they begin to establish themselves as administrators. For administrators who have been in the role, the list of behaviors may prompt reflecting on their practice and choosing an area for focused improvement.

Another practical takeaway from this study for administrators is the importance of collaboration among teachers and staff. Both middle schools represented in this study had time built into their school days for collaborating in two ways: on teams organized around groups of students and in PLCs organized around shared content. Both collaborative groups have specific goals that promote teacher effectiveness, teacher self-efficacy, and as a result, student achievement (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Louis & Lee, 2016). Based on this understanding, administrators could be more intentional about providing collaborative time during the workday for teachers and staff.

**Implications for teacher and staff leaders.** Whether formally or informally designated as leaders, empowering teachers and staff as leaders has a positive influence on the school culture, which is important as teachers have been identified as having the most significant influence on the learning environment (Kaffemanienè et al., 2017). Using the leadership behaviors identified in this study, schools may support teachers and staff in their effectiveness as leaders and continue to train and grow teachers and staff as leaders within the school (Carpenter, 2015)

**Implications for parents.** As parents become involved in the school, particularly in elementary and middle school level Parent Teacher Organizations, helping parent leaders navigate their role with practical resources may improve the effectiveness of such organizations. Leading a group that relies heavily on volunteers requires skills in “enabling others to act” and

“encouraging the heart” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), and so parent leaders may benefit from learning foundational leadership behaviors in those particular areas.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

I created boundaries for this study to address a specific gap in research, which included a lack of qualitative study surrounding school culture and a lack of study particularly in middle school settings. Although focused on middle schools, the leadership behaviors that contribute to a positive school culture may transfer to elementary and secondary level educational settings. I also chose to focus on middle school because of their proximity, and as a high school teacher, I wanted to eliminate my own biases to the greatest extent possible.

Another delimitation of this study was a lack of student input. Students are an essential stakeholder group and provide invaluable insight into the inner-workings of a school as the population being served in the school community. I chose not to include students in this study because of the complexity of conducting research with minors and the difficulty of obtaining participants. In addition, members of the school board of directors represent another stakeholder group that may have provided valuable insight. I did not include school board members as I focused on middle school, and school board members are not directly tied to a particular level of the school.

The limitations of this study include the lack of diversity of participants. While there was a fairly balanced representation of male and female participants, the ethnic diversity of the school administration, faculty, and staff does not mirror the ethnic diversity of the student population. This was cited by one participant as one of the most significant issues within the school’s culture.

Another limitation of this study relates to the geographic area where the study was conducted. The schools are located in a community that has a large university as an employer and resource for many, but the area is predominantly suburban/rural with access to resources. It is unclear how the findings of this study would compare to schools in an urban or inner-city setting or to a more rural setting with limited access to resources.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In light of the findings, delimitations, and limitations of this study, future research could take a variety of avenues. First, examining middle schools in other geographic areas such as schools in urban settings would be beneficial. In addition, examining middle schools with greater diversity, both of the student body and the school personnel, would be beneficial.

Second, further qualitative or mixed method studies involving other stakeholders, particularly students, would contribute further insight into the leadership behaviors that impact school culture. In the school district studied, students are encouraged to participate, speak up, and be involved. One participant suggested that the efforts made to know students outside of the classroom, to cheer for them at their sporting events, or attend their school plays or concerts, may impact the students' perceptions of school culture. Gathering student perspective on what contributes positively to school culture has great value. Other stakeholders, such as members of the school board of directors, also impact the culture of a school and the leadership style that a school identifies with as part of its culture. Including the school board of directors in data collection may provide valuable insight into leadership behaviors that influence a school's culture.

Using Kouzes and Posner's (2012) framework in a longitudinal study to determine the effects of the five practices on a school's culture may also prove valuable. School administration

could intentionally teach the leadership framework, using Kouzes and Posner's language through professional development during the first year of the study. In the following year, a researcher could conduct a qualitative study to examine the themes that emerge when the five practices have been implemented and are becoming part of the school's culture. In addition, a longitudinal study could be conducted to examine the impact of specific aspects of the five practices, such as the effectiveness of teacher collaboration time within the work day, or the impact of teacher/staff leadership on job satisfaction and/or efficacy.

Both middle schools studied have participated in restorative practices as part of their professional development expectations and utilize SWPBIS programs for behavioral expectations. One participant mentioned her role in studying and leading restorative practices professional development, and although it did not come across in data collection as foundational to the school's culture, possibly because of its newness, the use of restorative practices in purposeful relationship building may be another factor of school culture that warrants further exploration. Through quantitative and qualitative study, exploring the effectiveness of restorative practices and SWPBIS in terms of school culture may provide examples of effective programs and behaviors that positively influence school culture.

Finally, researchers could further examine the layers of culture within a school, or the cultures within a culture. In the middle school model that I examined, the team structure of the teachers was a significant part of each school's culture. Therefore, layers of culture, including the team culture, the school building culture, and the school district culture, add complexity to understanding a school's culture and the leadership behaviors that influence it. A mixed methods approach of gathering quantitative survey data and further exploring through interviews

and artifacts may provide valuable insight to how layers of culture relate to the overall climate and culture of a school.

### Summary

Through this qualitative multiple case study, I examined leadership behaviors that contribute to a positive school culture. Through conducting interviews, collecting artifacts, and observing leadership in the school setting, I witnessed behaviors of school leaders that influence the positive culture of a school. One of the biggest takeaways from this study is the importance of collaboration, and not just collaboration itself, but showing that collaboration is valued by making it part of the workday. The teams, PLCs, and committees provide opportunities for building relationships and sharing in decision-making that is valuable in terms of faculty and staff effectiveness and self-efficacy. One interview participant related a story about having worked with her team of four teachers for 14 years. She compared their commitment to each other to a family or even a marriage:

We've been talking about how we need to have an anniversary, like a wedding anniversary party, and we expect gifts, you know, because the four of us, we've worked well together for that long . . . we've stuck together. And I think that says something about the group of us, how we're not afraid to tell each other, like, if something's going wrong, or advice on how to fix it, no matter what it is, whether it's in the classroom, outside in the hallway, or our personal lives and things like that. I just think I've been very fortunate to be put on, and hired on a team that we've grown together and grown as a family, too.

The importance of the level of trust and collaboration through the team structure has considerable benefits to the overall school culture and student achievement (Aldridge & Fraser,

2016; Cansoy & Parlar, 2017; Demir, 2015; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Ohlson et al., 2016; Turan & Bektas, 2013).

Another considerable takeaway was having a system of acknowledging others, which Montem and Silvan Middle Schools accomplished through their ROAR programs. I was present during the faculty meeting in which staff members were recognized with a gift of a dozen donuts and felt the energy of the group as administrators enthusiastically recognized winners, and the recipients of the rewards were able to share their donuts with others. This gift in particular, while small in terms of monetary value, not only rewarded the winner but also allowed the winner to share their joy with others. This method of “encouraging the heart” incorporated the component of being specific and also sharing publicly in a way that energized the whole group and has the potential to impact faculty and staff job satisfaction (Cogaltay & Karadag, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Collaboration and systems of encouragement/recognition were foundational to the cultures of each middle school and have the potential to impact student success.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

November 21, 2018

Jennifer L. Schreiber

IRB Approval 3521.112118: How School Leaders Shape School Culture: A Qualitative Case Study

Dear Jennifer L. Schreiber,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research* **The Graduate School**  
*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jennifer Schreiber, and I am doctoral candidate at Liberty University. I am conducting research related to positive school culture as part of my dissertation to meet the requirements for the doctorate in education (Ed.D.). My study is designed to examine the behaviors of school leaders, including administrators, teachers, staff, and parents, that contribute to a positive school culture. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are currently a member of \_\_\_\_\_ administration, faculty, staff, or parent community, who has taken on a leadership role in the school, and you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one audio-recorded interview session that will last approximately one hour. You will also be asked to review a transcript of your interview for accuracy. In addition, I will be conducting public observations. While participants will not be directly or individually observed as part of the research, the researcher will be observing the public behaviors of faculty and staff, including faculty meetings, hallway interactions, and in-service professional development. Your name and title will be requested as part of your participation, but your information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms for participants and their schools will be used in any published reports.

To participate, please respond to me at \_\_\_\_\_

I have attached a copy of the consent form to this email. The consent form contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of your interview.

If you choose to participate, you will be entered to win a \$25 Amazon© gift card. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Schreiber

## Appendix C: Consent Form

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
11/21/2018 to 11/20/2019  
Protocol # 3521.112118

### CONSENT FORM

How School Leaders Shape School Culture: A Qualitative Case Study

Jennifer L. Schreiber

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on how leadership influences school culture. You were selected as a possible participant because you serve as a leader within your school or school community. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jennifer Schreiber, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to examine school leaders' behaviors that contribute to a school's culture. The central research question guiding this study is: How do school leaders influence a positive school culture?

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. All data will only be accessible by the researcher.
2. Review your transcript for accuracy, which should take no more than 15-20 minutes.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Participants may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their leadership practices and consider what makes them effective.

Benefits to society may include providing specific examples of leadership behaviors that are effective in creating a positive school culture. This could provide the basis for professional development for educators.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. Participants will be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 Amazon® gift card.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. I will assign pseudonyms to all participants and interviews will be conducted in a location that affords privacy to the interviewee. Research records will be stored securely on a password protected

personal computer, and only the researcher will have access to the records. After three years (per federal regulations), all electronic information will be deleted.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The recordings will be stored on a password protected computer and deleted after three years.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your school of employment [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer Schreiber. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Andrea Beam.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

### Appendix D: Journal (with sample excerpts)

Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
12/10/18	I need to stay focused on my research question – I’m not judging the culture – I’m looking for behaviors (a good reminder for interviewees as well). Focus on the HOW? and WHY?.
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
1/6/19	On 1/8, I will observe a faculty meeting at MMS. Keep an open mind – I’m not evaluating the culture. I am observing behaviors. I am observing interactions of those leading the meeting with other faculty and staff.
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
1/10/19	I had a great interview with Linda today. I was nervous to conduct my first interview and had some concerns about rumors that I had heard. Linda shared some issues that had occurred the previous year, but she felt confident that those were resolved and that the impact on the culture was in the process of improving.
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
1/16/19	Tomorrow I am interviewing someone that I worked with (in the same building) over ten years ago. I don’t recall any specific incidents that would color my perspective, but it is important to acknowledge and be aware that unlike most individuals I anticipate interviewing, I have interacted with this person previously.
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
2/6/19	Today’s interviewee surprised me with some negative comments. While the negative and positive comments were balanced, I need to think about what place, if any, they have in my study. On the one hand, I feel encouraged that people are being honest with me and that the form of sampling used is not just providing me with a single perspective. On the other hand, I’m focusing on behaviors that promote positive culture, and so it will be interesting to see how this perspective fits.
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
2/8/19	It is time for me to start formally analyzing data rather than to leave all of these thoughts swimming in my head. I am bogged down in transcribing, but patterns (potential themes?) are beginning to emerge: inclusivity/respect for diversity; SWPBIS.

Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
2/14/19	I'm getting concerned about participant response...I was on a roll, and I have hit a lull. I have interviewed all of the administrators, but I'm having trouble finding teachers to participate. Are people reading my emails? Should I email again? I don't want to be a nuisance!
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
2/26/19	My interview today brought to light the potential connection between the physical space (which contributes to the climate) and the culture of a school. SMS has an older building, and the lack of natural light and the disjointed parts of the building contribute to the perspective of the school.
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
2/28/19	Teaming and trust are emerging as significant potential themes!
Date	Journal Entry Excerpt
3/1/19	I have enough participants completed/scheduled, but I am concerned about the imbalance of male/female participants. I would like to have at least one more male to give a more balanced perspective. A potential limitation of this study is the lack of diversity of participants in general.

## Appendix E: Observation Protocol Form/Sample

### Observation (Date, Time, and Place)

January 8, 2019 at 9:30 a.m. (Two-hour delay schedule)  
Montem Middle School Cafeteria

**Participants (Number of and type, i.e. teacher, staff, administrator).** Teachers, paraprofessional staff, one principal, one assistant principal

**Description of Physical Space and Setup** School cafeteria; 2 rows of 5 round tables; 2 rows of 6-7 rectangular tables

Time/Activity	Notes	Reflection
9:30 – Assistant principal began the meeting	<p>“ROAR Drawing” – win a box of donuts (teachers nominate peers and they receive a prize) – 4 winners.</p> <p>Names drawn by head principal</p> <p>Reminder about ROAR tickets (gold tickets worth 5 regular ROAR tickets)</p>	<p>Great idea – would love to see this at our school</p> <p>Could feel the enthusiasm for winners</p>
9:35 – Assistant principal begins focus of the meeting	<p>Book discussion – The Hard Hat by Jon Gordon (21 ways to be a great teammate)</p> <p>Reminder about ROAR (Responsibility. Organization. Attitude. Respect.)</p> <p>Using a padlet (padlet.com), teachers individually share thoughts in response to questions anonymously; administrators are modeling an instructional activity and using tech to deliver; music</p>	<p>Following along on the padlet was cool to watch. Teachers were engaged and thoughtful in their responses.</p> <p>Was music helpful to the atmosphere or distracting?</p> <p>A great method for capturing individual thinking</p>

playing in the background; approximately 10 minutes for this activity; after some talking, everyone seemed to engage in the activity.

9:46 – Assistant principal announces “one minute working to finish individual padlet work before moving with a partner.”

Teachers moved to different table groups (mostly began at round tables, then moved to rectangular tables for partner work).

Verbal expression of thanks to the person who made the padlet – specific recognition of someone’s work.

Also gave a shout out to the maker of the padlet: “If you want to learn more about padlet, see [REDACTED], she’s an expert!”

9:48

Teachers were very engaged in discussion. As the time went on, the volume became louder and louder (of conversation). Looking around the room, there were a lot of head nods as teachers were engaged in discussion. The principal joined the conversation in a couple different groups.

Demonstrations of active listening

Importance of principals engaging with faculty and learning alongside them

9:59 – One minute warning for partner time; then move into group time.

It seemed as though some had already moved into group conversations, particularly those who were still at round tables.

10:00 – all moved into group conversation (groups were set up at the rectangular tables, but staff were told if it was too loud, they could move to other areas of the room)

The room was not quite as loud as group conversations began (fewer people talking at one time).

I wonder how groups were determined for this meeting? Did people choose? Were they somehow assigned?

The principal and assistant principal joined a group.

At 10:05, one of the teachers turned off the music. At the same time, someone got up and took a picture of the staff working in their groups.

At 10:08, the assistant principal noticed that a cafeteria worker was trying to push a cart out the door and got up to open the door to her (from halfway across the room).

At 10:11, conversation started to get louder, laughter, head nods, teachers making eye contact with the speaker; at a few tables, laptops are open (are those teachers taking group notes or are they distracted from the conversation?). Some laptops still show the padlet. One teacher who seemed off task moved back to the padlet.

At 10:15, assistant principal disconnects computer, puts on coat (needs to leave to greet students?); opens doors to let students into the building.

Engagement was generally high among faculty and staff; including paraprofessionals in this professional development is great.

Assistant principal very aware of all that is going on; demonstrates helpfulness/servant leadership

10:16 – Some are beginning to pack up and leave the meeting

10:17 – Others begin to follow. Principal begins to wrap up. “As you conclude your

Principal final comment – encourages teacher safety over hurrying to a meeting on bad weather days

Principal demonstrates care for staff

Is it normal/acceptable for teachers to begin to leave

conversations, I have two announcements.”

before meeting formally concludes?

10:19 – Meeting concludes and teachers depart.

### Appendix F: Theme Development Chart

Expectations and Values (blue)	Model the Way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clarify values</li> <li>▪ Set example by actions</li> </ul>
diversity and inclusion learning professional development ROAR/PBIS/schoolwide/SWIS visibility presence engagement	
Vision and Foundations of Culture/Climate (pink)	Inspire a Shared Vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Imagine exciting possibilities</li> <li>▪ Enlist others in common vision</li> </ul>
safe/safety ROAR/PBIS/schoolwide/SWIS *STUDENTS* anti-bullying anti-harassment kid(s)/child(ren)	
Listen and Problem-Solving (green)	Challenge the Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Search for opportunities to improve</li> <li>▪ Experiment and take risks</li> </ul>
solution-oriented listen shared decision-making try new things new ideas take risks (as professionals)	
Relationships and Building Leadership (orange)	Enable Others to Act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foster collaboration</li> <li>▪ Strengthen others</li> </ul>
Access PLC trust team/committee “team” collaboration leadership opportunities	
Appreciation (purple)	Encourage the Heart (purple) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognize contributions</li> <li>▪ Celebrate values and victories</li> </ul>
personal notes ROAR tickets/ROAR paws thank you – specific in person/face to face TIME! open-door policy kudos	