

A STUDY OF SCHOOL CULTURE, LEADERSHIP, TEACHER QUALITY AND STUDENT
OUTCOMES VIA A PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
PARTICIPATING IN A SCHOOL REFORM INITIATIVE

By

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To my family

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among teacher quality characteristics and school culture components and their influence upon student attendance and suspension rates. In addition, the research also examined the educational leadership practices of exemplary school principals in relation to the components of a collaborative school culture.

The sample included 50 elementary schools in the state of Florida. Schools were selected based upon their partnership with the University of Florida and the Lastinger Center for Learning. The basis for the research was grounded in the educational performance framework of inputs and processes influencing outcomes.

School culture surveys were administered to examine six components of collaborative culture identified as collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, unity of purpose, professional development, collegial support, and learning partnership. Using the school as the unit of analysis, data were also collected examining student absences and suspensions as well as teacher input characteristics such as years teaching, percentage out of field, advanced degrees, and certification as reported by the Florida Department of Education's School Indicators Report.

Finally, interviews were conducted to examine the strategies and practices utilized by exemplar school principals to augment the data and better inform practice.

Using multiple regression and Pearson correlations, the data were examined to determine the nature of the relationship between school outputs, processes and inputs. Three research questions, six null hypotheses, and one open-ended question was introduced to examine the correlational and predictive associations amongst the variables. The findings revealed that as teacher collaboration increased, the model predicted that student suspensions would decrease by 6.709%. In addition, the model predicted that when the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school increased, student suspensions would decrease by 0.16%. Finally, as the percentage of non-certified teachers within a school increased, the student suspension percentage increased by .22%. The exemplar interviews revealed comprehensive discussions regarding components of a collaborative school culture and educational leadership practices related to data-driven decision-making, developing stakeholder partnerships, teacher guided professional development, and fostering relationships and open communication.

The findings offer valuable insight into the characteristics of quality teaching and school culture that demonstrate greatest impact on student attendance and suspensions and may influence educational policy, teacher training, educational leadership, and school reform initiatives.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a report of a statistical modeling study of the relationship between school leadership, school culture, teacher quality characteristics and the influence these variables have upon student outcomes. The research is based upon data gathered during the 2008-2009 school year and includes 50 public elementary schools in the state of Florida. Surveys and school leadership interviews were administered to examine teacher quality characteristics, educational leadership, and components of the collaborative school culture. Data were analyzed in relation to teacher input characteristics such as years teaching, certification, percentage teaching out of field, and highest degree obtained. The research was analyzed using multiple regression and correlational analysis in order to examine the data in relation to student attendance and suspension data. The findings offer insight into the characteristics and practices of quality teaching, school leadership and school culture that demonstrate the greatest impact on student attendance and suspensions and thus may influence educational policy, teacher training, educational leadership, and school reform initiatives.

In this current educational context of high stakes accountability, public schools in Florida are under significant pressure to increase student achievement. This pressure is even greater in high poverty environments as those schools are impacted by multiple challenges, which serve to intensify the problem. Schools are making considerable efforts to raise student achievement, yet the evaluation methods used often include only a single annual exam, offering a snapshot that gives schools little direction toward changes they can make and no way to measure progress toward the goal. Schools yearn for measureable, formative ways to move toward their goal of improved learning for all students. A continuous cycle of sharing and collectively using data for

growth is a key to successful school improvement and reform, especially in high-poverty schools (Fullan, 2001; Reeves, 2003).

Research affirms that student learning will not increase substantially unless students are actually in the classroom with the opportunity to learn (Jacobson, 2008; Romero & Chang, 2008). Florida schools face dramatic challenges in these areas each year with nearly 10% of the student population experiencing 21 or more days absent and 176,765 out-of-school suspensions (FLDOE, 2008). As these challenges mount for schools throughout the state, we look to the literature for solutions including research suggesting elements within the control of schools: (1) the expertise and quality of its teachers (Darling Hammond, 1997 & 2000), (2) establishing a strong school culture that supports teacher learning and improvement (Deal & Peterson, 1999) and (3) the practices of school leaders in shaping a collaborative school culture (Teske & Schneider, 1999).

In this study, 50 high poverty schools in various districts throughout the state of Florida were studied to determine the relationship among student outcomes (student attendance and student suspensions) and the measurable characteristics of teacher quality, the components of a collaborative of school culture, and the practices of school leaders in relation to school culture. Ultimately, if schools are able to improve the quality of their teachers, the practices of their leaders and the collaborative culture in which they work, then what is the relationship among those variables and the outcomes of improved attendance and decreased school suspension rates? The context of this research is to inform practice in this area with the hopes that findings will equip schools with measurable means to address factors that are likely to at least give children the opportunity to learn and achieve.

The theoretical basis for the research is grounded in the educational performance framework (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; Levin, 1998). A performance framework (Figure 1-1) may be conceptualized as having three main parts: inputs, processes, and outputs (Rouse & Putterill, 2003). For the purpose of this research, inputs apply to the characteristics the individual brings to the workplace including certification, years of teaching experience, advanced degrees and teaching within field. Processes refer to pedagogical development and practice in and outside of the classroom including the elements analyzed with the School Culture Survey. Outputs are the immediate and recurring indicators of students within a school and include attendance rates and suspension rates.

The quality of a teacher can have a direct and lasting impact on student achievement (Ingersoll, 2003; Rice, 2003; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). A quality teacher can negate the effects of a student's socio-economic status and lead to increased student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Porter-Magee, 2004). Additionally, no adults are more important to student success than teachers (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005a; Haycock, 2001; Wechsler, Tiffany-Morales, Campbell, Humphrey, Kim, & Shields, 2007). The importance of teacher quality is further exemplified by research that determined teacher expertise and certification are better predictors of student success than class size, teacher salaries, and per-student spending (Edweek, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Thus, it is imperative to determine what constitutes quality teaching and adapt policies that ensure that quality teachers are trained, recruited, and retained to meet the learning goals of students.

Defining "quality" teaching and quantifying teacher quality characteristics is complicated and highly contested (Walsh, 2007). However, educational researchers have studied indicators of teacher quality found to promote positive student outcomes. For policy makers to provide

comprehensive teacher evaluation programs, it is paramount to understand what constitutes quality teaching. Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) found that student achievement increased and dropout rates decreased when teachers were certified in their field, obtained their master's degrees, and were enrolled in graduate studies. In addition, she contends that teacher preparation and certification had the strongest correlation for student achievement, more than any other school based factors. Furthermore, teaching in field, in math and science particularly, led to increased student achievement (Goldhaber and Brewer, 1997).

In addition to quality teacher, school leadership plays a paramount role in influencing teacher-working conditions. Effective instructional leadership is generally recognized as the most important characteristic of school administrators (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). Cosner and Peterson (2003) go so far as to claim that promoting teacher professional development is the most influential educational leadership behavior. Principals and administrators are needed to lead educational improvement, foster effective change efforts, lead the implementation of new standards, and are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1998).

Fullan (2001) suggests that school leaders participate in activities that encourage teacher learning. These activities may include leading educational improvement, fostering effective change efforts, and directing the implementation of new standards, which are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1998). In addition, educational leaders should establish a partnership with teachers to work towards the primary goal of improving teaching and learning (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). The importance of educational leadership as it relates to teacher quality and supervision is further supported by Hoy (2009) in the assertion that good teaching is the ultimate goal of educational leadership and the policies and actions of educational

leaders should foster ways to improve teaching and learning. Thus, administrators at all levels must become knowledgeable not only of the effective techniques of teacher evaluation, but more importantly of the research-based educational strategies that have been successful at improving teacher efficacy and student learning (Goddard, 2001; VonVillas, 2004)

The relationship between effective teaching and effective leadership is reinforced in the vital role of school culture. Among the numerous definitions of school culture, Deal and Peterson (1990) and Schein (1985) affirm that school culture refers to the deep patterns of values and beliefs and traditions that have been formed over the course of the school's history and which are understood by members of the school community. Peterson (2002) suggests that culture is built within a school over time as teachers, school leaders, parents and students work together. It is the school culture that often influences the staff development and professional growth that takes place within a school. Fullan and Steiglebauer (1991) contend that the key to successful change is not only a change in organizational structure but also more importantly a change in the culture. A positive school culture may have a significant influence on the academic and social success of the students within schools (Squires & Kranyik, 1996). When a school exhibits characteristics of a positive school culture, there are fewer suspensions, increased attendance rates, and increased achievement on standardized test scores (Anson et al., 1991; Becker & Hedges, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have found substantial evidence to suggest that a collaborative school culture and the characteristics of effective teaching may positively influence student outcomes. Specifically, the quality of a teacher may have a direct and lasting influence upon student outcomes (Ingersoll, 2003; Rice, 2003; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Furthermore, teacher quality is a better predictor of student success than class size, teacher salaries, and per-student spending (Darling-Hammond, 1996). A quality teacher can negate the effects of a student's

socio-economic status and lead to increased student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Porter-Magee, 2004).

There are numerous teacher quality factors that have been proven to significantly influence student achievement and student outcomes. Higher Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and higher grades for teachers in college resulted in higher student outcomes (Gitomer, 2007). Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) states that student achievement increased and dropout rates decreased when teachers were certified in their field, obtained their master's degrees, and were enrolled in graduate studies. Further research affirms the importance of educator experience suggesting that years teaching shows a very strong relationship with increased student achievement (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2001; Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996).

The culture within a school also influences student achievement (Levin, 1987). Deal & Peterson (1999), contend that higher achieving schools were those that demonstrated cultures that fostered collaboration, empowerment, and engagement. In contrast, schools with toxic cultures with little stakeholder collaboration were more likely to produce poor academic achievement. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (1998) suggest that successful schools are more capable of increasing student achievement when the culture shares common characteristics including a commitment to the students, respect for shared decision making, a collective belief in the importance of professional growth, collective celebrations of success, and a mission grounded in the ideal that all students can achieve.

Amongst student outcomes, student attendance and student suspension rates are important factors in the academic success of students. Researchers have established significant correlations between student attendance in the classroom and academic achievement (Seldon, 2003). Students with better attendance than their classmates exhibit superior performance on

standardized achievement tests and are less likely to be retained (Barth, 1984; Nichols, 2003). Also, high rates of student absenteeism are associated with increased risk of students dropping out of school and the increased likelihood of delinquent behaviors such as violence and alcohol/drug usage (Baker, 2000; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). Research further suggests that the utilization of out-of-school suspensions may increase the likelihood of absenteeism (Baker, 2000; Bell et al., 1994). Both traditional absenteeism (by choice of the student or family) and out of school suspensions end in the same result-the student is out of class and therefore is at a serious disadvantage academically (Baker, 2000). Understanding the significance of these student outcomes (student attendance and out-of school suspensions) is paramount to the significance of the study.

Furthermore, a recent study of school-level attendance rates showed a significant relationship between school-level socio-economic status (SES) and school-level annual daily attendance (Reardon, 2008). This relationship between attendance and student achievement is even more pronounced when examining at-risk and minority students. Ali and Dufresne (2008) contend that children who are most likely to be excluded from school are the ones who are least able to afford to fall behind. A Minnesota study of public school student achievement and attendance data found that boosting student attendance by as little as one percent could significantly increase test scores of minority students (Roby, 2004). A recent study by Reardon (2008) examining the relationship between school-level socio-economic status and school-level annual daily attendance, demonstrated that the highest poverty schools exhibited the highest excessive absence rates. Thus, minority and high poverty students may have the most to gain with increased attendance.

Out-of-school student suspensions can also have wide-ranging, detrimental effects on both the individual and the school community including increased student dropout rates, homelessness and crime (Arthur, et al. 2002; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Ali and Dufresne (2008) report that suspensions may increase the likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system, as children and youth who are sent home from school often remain unsupervised when their parents work. Students who are suspended are also less likely to graduate from high school as they seek to avoid the setting where castigation and punishment is being administered (Railsback, 2004). Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) further contend that adults who were frequently absent or suspended as teenagers are much more likely than those who were not to have inferior physical and mental health, lower paying jobs, an increased chance of living in poverty, and more reliance on welfare support.

Beyond the effects of the use of suspension in schools on learning outcomes, suspensions may also prove to be an ineffective method of preventing school discipline issues (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Craven, 2008). Suspension omits students from school property and school activities, yet offers no real strategies or actions to further preventing repeat infractions. Ali and Dufresne (2008) in a report called “Missing Out: Suspending Students from Connecticut Schools” examined student suspension rates and policies and determined that many contradicted the intended nature of suspension as a punishment and to deter students from future infractions. For example, one district was utilizing out-of-school suspensions as punishment for excessive absences (Craven, 2008). Suspension policies, ultimately, should be designed, implemented, and evaluated based upon the academic and social needs of students.

Student suspension data has also created much controversy in the demographics of the students being suspended. A disproportional number of minority students, male students, and

special education students receive out-of school suspensions (Constenbader & Markson, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Wu, et al, 1982). A study of middle school student punishment practices by Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson (2002) exposed a differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African-American students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation. A study by Bowman (2006) of the suspension practices of schools in Kentucky found that African American students are suspended from school two to 17 times as often as whites in some districts. These issues further highlight the significance student suspensions and the reduction thereof can play upon school success and student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine if teacher quality characteristics and school culture components are related to student attendance and suspension rates. Specifically this study will address the following questions and the associated null hypotheses:

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between the characteristics of teacher quality and student attendance and suspension rates?
2. Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality?
3. Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates?
4. What are the practices of educational leaders that contribute to a collaborative school culture?

Null Hypotheses

Ho1: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates.

- Ho2: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school).
- Ho3: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates.
- Ho4: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates.
- Ho5: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school).
- Ho6: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates.

Definition of Key Terms

School Improvement Initiatives

- Programs and policies meant to improve schools are often termed school improvement or school reform initiatives. The first major landmark program in the current era of education reform emerged with the publication of the report, “A Nation at Risk” (1983). The report examined the lack of achievement within the K-12 public education environment, from low basic comprehension rates to high dropout rates. NCLB (2001) and the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act further emphasized the need for school reform with increased emphasis on closing the achievement gap, teacher quality and widespread, comprehensive assessment and evaluation.

School Culture

- Culture within a school is the product of the shared values, beliefs, priorities, expectations and norms: expressed in tangible forms. (West Burnham, 1992). Schein (1984) describes culture as the tangible artifacts, values and beliefs, and underlying assumptions.

Educational Leadership.

- Principals and school leaders who forge partnerships with teachers and school community members, with the ultimate goal of the improvement of teaching and learning (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). Educational leadership also involves establishing

clearly defined goals, allocating adequate resources to support instruction, assessing and evaluating teachers, helping to design school curriculum, and collaborating with school community to establish exemplary teaching and learning conditions (Dufour, 2003; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004).

Student Learning Outcomes

- Student learning outcomes are defined in relation to the knowledge, skill, and aptitude that students gain as a result of their participation in a particular educational experience, setting or event (Terenzini, 1997)

Vision

- An organization's vision articulates a view of a realistic, plausible, future for the organization. The vision should be clear and concise and detail the clear direction for the school's initiatives and change efforts (Kotter, 1996)

Data –Driven-Decision-Making

- Data-driven decision-making is a diagnostic tool that encourages teachers to tailor instruction to student needs. Thus, it finds that they can better and more easily direct their students toward success (T.H.E. Journal, 2003). With data driving our decisions, we are no longer beholden, to hunches, assumptions, and opinions (Bernhardt, 2004). With data we have the knowledge to know the what, who, when, where, and how the teaching and learning is taking place in our schools and it allows us to develop informed decisions on how to best serve our educators and children.

Professional Learning Communities.

- A professional learning community is a school community that focuses its efforts on enhancing teaching and learning. PLC's provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and to learn how to become more effective in their work with students. Furthermore, educational leaders play an instrumental role in implementing the conditions that allow schools to become professional learning communities (Newman & Wehlage, 1995).

Out of School Suspensions (OSS)

- Out of School Suspensions are defined as the exclusion of a student from the school environment and surroundings for a period of time, typically not exceeding ten consecutive school days (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). School suspension is used as a punitive measure administered in response to an inappropriate behavior or action taken by a student. Suspensions are often used as a "last resort" when traditional teacher and administrator actions and techniques fail to alleviate the situation or because of a particularly grievous infraction.

Socio-Economic Status (SES)

- A family's socioeconomic status is determined by family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community (NCREL, 1996). For distribution of funds under Title I, public schools are annually ranked according to the percentage of children eligible for free and reduced price school meals as an annual indicator of the socioeconomic status of the school's student population (U.S. D.O.E., 1996).

Collaborative Process.

- Collaborative process is defined by DuFour (2003) as the process in which educators work together to examine and adapt professional practice to improve the teaching and learning that takes place within schools.

Out-of Field Teaching.

- Teachers assigned to teach subjects that do not match their training or education (Ingersoll, 2003)

Overview of the Methodology

As a mixed method study, the research will utilize a statistical survey and statistical modeling perspective. The research methods utilized to collect data will include the use of surveys and interviews with educational leaders.

Data were obtained for the 2008-2009 school year from 50 schools in Florida. Sample schools were selected based upon their full and partial participation in a statewide school improvement initiative directed by the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida. The Lastinger Center focuses on improving academic achievement by enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, and leadership in elementary schools throughout the state. The Lastinger Center for Learning is currently working with five districts throughout the state of Florida. These districts represent a variety of characteristics including large urban areas such as Miami-Dade, Pinellas and Duval counties. Their partnerships target elementary schools with high poverty,

high percentages of students reading below grade level, and a history of low achievement on standardized tests.

The Professional Significance of the Study

Staffing our nation's schools with highly qualified teachers is of utmost importance for improved student learning. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) requires a highly qualified teacher to have a bachelor's degree, full state certification and licensure defined by the state, and demonstrated competency, as defined by the state, in each core academic subject he or she teaches.

The resulting legislation of states has produced various ways of determining "high quality." Some see this disparity as providing inconsistencies and lowering the standards of teacher quality, while others see the variety as a way to cause growth and change within the system (Keller, 2004). Considerable debate centers on the behaviors of a highly qualified teacher (Walsh & Hale, 2004). States and Local Education Agencies have developed teacher induction programs for new teachers, mentor programs, peer review panels and a number of other systems to increase teacher quality and commitment. These programs are intended to expand the skills and knowledge of teachers. However, the direct connection between these programs and teachers' actual practice needs to be examined. This examination manifests itself during teacher observation and evaluation, which is a primary responsibility of educational leaders.

Therefore, this study may ultimately add to the research base to understand what characteristics of quality teachers lead to increased student achievement, especially in high poverty, urban districts where less qualified teachers are more likely to be employed (Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2002). School administrators and district personnel would be able to use this study to help guide their decision-making in terms of hiring the most qualified teachers and school personnel.

This research will also have implications for institutions of higher education in their understanding of the teacher preparation and training that may influence student outcome variables (Liston, et al., 2008). Previous research suggests that teachers' degree levels consistently demonstrated strong relations with increased student achievement (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996). The importance of certificate producing colleges of education and institutions granting advanced degrees could be further advanced with the data to support their role in helping to produce quality teachers.

In addition to teacher quality, the role of school culture within this research may well have a lasting and wide-ranging influence on school improvement and school reform initiatives. Working collaboratively with school leadership and teachers to strengthen the culture of the school, with the intent of improving teaching practice and student learning, is a promising school reform strategy (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2007). It is the unique characteristics of school culture that were analyzed as part of this study that will help to enrich the future work of school reform initiatives. Rather than sweeping reform efforts that often focus on an abundant array of school factors within a school (Steinberg, 1996), the data will examine each of the school culture factors individually in relation to student outcomes.

Analyzing each factor individually for a significant correlation between variables will help inform current and future school improvement policies and initiatives at the local, state, and national levels. District personnel, administration, and school communities as a whole will be able to develop more effective plans and policies for bringing about change in school culture; and ultimately, student achievement.

The sample population also serves to enhance the significance of the findings. The schools participating in the research represent elementary schools in urban and rural districts throughout

the state of Florida with high rates of minority students, teacher turnover, significant free and reduced lunch student populations, and historically low student achievement scores. This research seems likely to enrich the knowledge base available to policy makers, administrators, and district personnel serving teachers and students in districts throughout the nation that mirror similar attributes of the sample population.

The methods chosen for this study provide insight into the impact school culture and the characteristics of effective teaching may have upon student outcomes. Rather than focus directly on standardized test scores, this study focuses on two distinct variables: attendance rates and out-of-school suspensions. These two factors have been found to influence student achievement as well as student efficacy and graduation rates (Sheldon, 2003).

Another distinct advantage of this methodology is that by examining these two factors, validity issues are minimized. By solely examining test scores, factors such as test taking conditions, “teaching to the test”, and validity of the test itself may influence the actual measurement of student learning. When examining student attendance and suspension rates, two factors linked to student achievement, there can be a stronger direct relationship when discussing the research question.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations

Certain delimitations impacted the generalizability of this study to settings and individuals beyond those that were studied (Gall et al., 1996).

- Elementary level schools represented the sample population.
- The sample population included only schools from districts in Florida.
- This study specifically isolated the participating schools from the general population of schools and districts throughout the state.

- The school data examined were based on a snapshot of one period of time during the fall of 2008 while the student data were limited to 2007 figures.
- School participation in the data collection was not completely voluntary. School Culture Surveys and instruments were administered as part of the mutual agreement between the Lastinger Center for Learning and these participating schools.

Limitations

Certain limitations are detailed to demonstrate the assumptions and restrictions included in the research.

It is assumed that the participant's responses were answered accurately and in a manner that was not influenced by the participating school's professional relationship with the researcher or the cooperating institutions.

Assumptions were made that economic conditions and changes in each school beyond the control the study would not impact the validity of the study

Assumptions were made that the participants had common understanding of the school culture survey and the data collection processes being utilized.

Caution is warranted in inferring casual relationship in this study obtained through the use of perception-based instruments.

Overview of the Study

In Chapter One, the topic of the study was introduced. This includes a background to the study, a summary of the purpose of the study, the research questions that guided the study, the significance of the research, delimitations, and definitions of the key terms associated with this research. Chapter two includes a review of the current literature and research of characteristics of effective teaching, the roles of the educational leader, the impact of school culture upon teacher working conditions and student achievement, the significance of school improvement initiatives and the examination of attendance and suspensions in relation to student achievement. In chapter three, an outline of the methodology utilized to examine the relationships between school culture, educational leadership, and teacher quality with student outcomes. Next, chapter four includes the analysis of the data and as well as an examination of the research findings. Finally,

chapter five includes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for theory and practical applications for school districts, school principals, educational policy makers, and institutions of higher education.

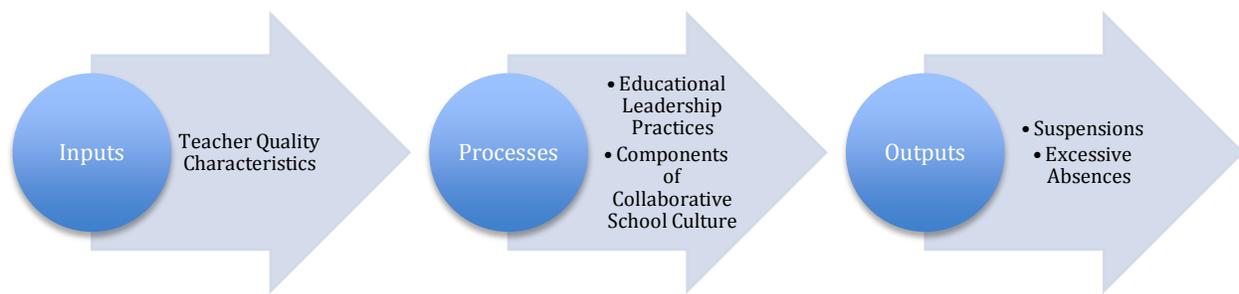


Figure 1-1 Performance Framework (Rouse and Putterill, 2003)

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Introduced in the first chapter, the theoretical basis for the research is grounded in the educational performance framework (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997; Levin, 1998). A performance framework may be conceptualized as having three main parts: inputs, processes, and outputs (Rouse & Putterill, 2003). As it relates to this study, “inputs” apply to the characteristics the individual brings to the workplace. Examples include the highest degree earned, the number of years teaching, teaching within field and state certification. Relevant literature has been examined to determine the ways in which these input characteristics are associated with quality teaching and influence student achievement.

“Processes” refer to pedagogical development and practice in and outside of the classroom. Examples include the nature of collaboration with peers, administrator evaluations, and professional development activities. Aggregated at the school level, these variables form the heart of educational leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Dart, 1990). Educational leadership research is examined to determine the influence upon student achievement and teacher working conditions. In addition, the components of school culture are analyzed to offer a more cohesive understanding of the relationship between effective educational leadership and a collaborative school culture (Leithwood, 1992).

“Outputs” are the immediate and recurring indicators of students within a school. Examples include attendance rates and suspension rates. The relevant research has been examined to determine the influence these outcomes have upon student achievement. Furthermore, an analysis of these output variables will determine significant input and processes influence in previous research. Analysis will include the relationship between years of teaching

experience and the level of student suspensions and the impact collaborative school culture may have upon reducing excessive absences.

Literature detailing comprehensive school improvement initiatives is also included in this research to offer insight into the manner in which these variables (inputs, processes, and outputs) may be utilized to bring about positive and lasting change in schools. Quality teaching, a collaborative school culture, consistent educational leadership, and improved student outcomes are all essential elements of school improvement and reform initiatives (Barth, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Dufour, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Fullan, 1999, Marzano, 2003)

Characteristics of Teacher Quality

The quality of a teacher may have a direct and lasting impact on student achievement (Ingersoll, 2003; Rice, 2003; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). A quality teacher can negate the effects of a student's socio-economic status and lead to increased student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Porter-Magee, 2004). Additionally, no adults are more important to student success than teachers (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005a; Haycock, 2001; Wechsler, Tiffany-Morales, Campbell, Humphrey, Kim, & Shields, 2007). The importance of teacher quality is further exemplified by the research that determined that teacher expertise and certification are better predictors of student success than class size, teacher salaries, and per-student spending (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Thus, it is imperative to determine what constitutes quality teaching and adapt policies that ensure that quality teachers are trained, recruited, and retained to meet the learning goals of students.

To achieve its school reform goals, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires a "highly qualified teacher" in all classrooms. States, districts, and schools are faced with this pressing issue, not only both because they want to ensure the quality of their teachers, but also because many face a grave shortage of teachers today as well as in the near future (State

Higher Education Executive Offices, 2007). Yet, there continues to be contradictions in current policies. For example, in Georgia, teachers receive the equivalent professional development credit for attending a one-day training as they would if they received a doctoral degree in education (Porter-Magee, 2004). Consequently, if policy makers are to provide comprehensive teacher preparation, placement and evaluation programs, it is paramount to understand what constitutes quality teaching.

The relevant literature highlights the issues that arise when determining what makes a teacher effective. Walsh (2007), stresses that the impact of a teacher is difficult to isolate when so many other variables may be influencing student learning such as demographics and support services. Furthermore, Wenglinsky (2002) claims that the current methods used to determine teacher quality are the easiest to measure including teacher certification and level of education. Yet, it is qualities of a teacher that may matter most (empathy, a belief that a child can succeed, cultural awareness) that are the most challenging to measure (Walsh & Hale, 2004).

There are numerous factors that have been proven to significantly influence student achievement and student outcomes. Higher Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and higher grades for teachers in college resulted in higher student outcomes (Gitomer, 2007). Linda Darling-Hammond (2000) states that student achievement increased and dropout rates decreased when teachers were certified in their field, obtained their master's degrees, and were enrolled in graduate studies. More specifically, in a 2002 study, Darling-Hammond noted that teacher preparation and certification were the strongest predictors of student achievement in reading and mathematics. The most strongly significant influence on student achievement was the percentage of highly qualified teachers, defined as the proportion holding both full certification and a major degree in the field taught.

In 2003, nearly 50% of all secondary school educators were teaching out of field. However, recent research also reveals that high school math and science teachers who have a major in the subjects they teach (“teaching in field”) elicit greater gains from their students than out-of-field teachers, controlling for student’s previous academic achievement and socioeconomic status (EducationWeek, 2004; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000).

Darling-Hammond and others, (2001) suggest that teaching experience may also play a vital role in predicting student achievement, reporting data that demonstrated higher achievement scores of students with more experienced teachers. Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002), discovered that experienced teachers produced the lowest suspension rates amongst their students, which has a positive influence upon student achievement. Further research affirms the importance of educator experience in research, which suggests that years teaching shows a very strong relationship with increased student achievement (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996).

In fact, Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) found strong influence of teacher certification on student achievement in high school mathematics and science, above and beyond the effects of teachers’ subject matter degrees. Completion of education coursework, leading to traditional certification, has been found to positively influence teacher performance and increase student achievement (Byrne, 1983; Ferguson & Womack, 1993). Darling –Hammond (1999) further supports the importance of teacher certification in that teachers certified in mathematics contributed to higher mathematics scores in their students.

In contrast, other research contends that teachers with advanced degrees resulted in lower student achievement in certain subjects and that emergency certification teachers performed as well as traditionally certified teachers (Walsh, 2007). Wenglinsky (2002) determined that it was not certification or experience, but rather teacher proficiency of a basic skills exam that led to

increased student achievement. Furthermore, studies have also shown data that students taking English classes achieved less from language arts teachers who held certification (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1997).

Despite these contradictions, numerous themes emerged throughout the literature that help to determine what constitutes teacher quality and thus give local, state, and federal agencies the opportunity to develop more effective and comprehensive preparation, recruitment, retention, and evaluation methods. For example, quality teachers in urban settings were those that held and communicated a belief that the children could succeed regardless of the obstacles they faced including low socio-economic status, a lack of adequate health care, and limited exposure to academic support at an early age (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Furthermore, rather than focus on the deficiencies of the child, a quality teacher will harness the strengths and capabilities of his or her students (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Corbett, Williams, and Wilson (2002) support this in Effort and Excellence in Urban Classrooms by explaining that effective teachers work to overcome the barriers to student achievement and embrace the belief that all students can succeed and that the responsibility of student success lies within the teacher.

Therefore, true teacher quality may be witnessed in the integration of measurable qualities (certification, professional development participation, education levels) and teacher beliefs and practices such as fostering a child's strengths, effective teaching strategies, and believing in their role as teachers. As Darling-Hammond (2000) and Ladson-Billings (2001) emphasize, effective teaching requires the combination of high expectations, cultural congruence within the classroom, and knowledge of effective teaching strategies.

In the past decade, more than 25 states have passed legislation to enhance teacher recruitment, education, certification, evaluation and professional development (Darling-

Hammond, 1997). Yet, there is a striking shortage of research detailing the impact on achievement that may be associated with widespread policies and institutional practices that have an effect on the overall level of characteristics of effective teaching displayed by educators. There remains conflicting evidence regarding teacher quality, how it is evaluated, and how evaluation policies can influence teaching quality (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Traditional evaluation methods have failed to encourage professional communication and often rely on observable methods that have little to do with student learning or teacher quality (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Shifting away from the traditional methods of evaluation is essential, as educational policy makers now should evaluate teachers not only on their credentials but also on their practices and ultimately the student outcomes (Porter-Magee, 2004). Teacher evaluation is a formal process to ensure quality and therefore, should be centered on the teacher and the results that they are producing (Berube & Dexter, 2006; Peterson, 2000). Goodland (1990) suggests that states should focus solely on licensing and evaluation should be delegated solely to local schools and districts because evaluation methods should be adapted to fit the unique needs of each learning community.

Educational Leadership

Consistent leadership by school principals is often the one essential element in successful schools (Teske & Schneider, 1999). Specifically, the function of administrators as educational leaders is generally recognized as one of the important roles of the school principal (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). The responsibilities of an effective educational leader may include leading educational improvement, fostering effective change efforts, directing the implementation of new standards, and these are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1998). A recent analysis of teacher working conditions in North Carolina by the Southeast Center for

Teacher Quality (2004) discovered that leadership was the single greatest predictor of whether or not high schools made Adequate Yearly Progress, more so than school size and teacher retention.

Effective educational leaders influence others and bring about positive change by exemplifying the values and behaviors they want others in the school community to adopt (Elmore, 2000; Kotter, 1996). Fullan suggests that effective school leaders participate in activities that encourage teacher learning (2001). Cosner and Peterson (2003) go so far as to proclaim that promoting teacher professional development was the most influential educational leadership behavior. Furthermore, principals and administrators need to lead educational improvement, foster effective change efforts, lead the implementation of new standards, and are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1998). In addition, it is these educational leaders who should establish a partnership with teachers with the primary goal of the improvement of teaching and learning (Hoy, 2009). The importance of educational leadership as it relates to teacher quality and evaluation is further supported by Hoy (2009) in the assertion that the most important role of the educational leader is to discover ways to improve teaching and learning. Thus, administrators at all levels must become knowledgeable not only of the effective techniques of evaluation, but more importantly of the research-based educational strategies that have been successful at improving teacher efficacy and student learning (VonVillas, 2004).

The key elements of good educational leadership are an ability to provide informed feedback, guidance, support, and professional development activities (Heck, 1992; NCREL). Teske and Schneider (1999) affirmed that it is the educational leader who sets the tone for high achievement and high standards for the teaching and learning within schools. Their research of high performing school leaders in New York City revealed four universal features amongst

principals interviewed include controlling staff hiring and professional development practices, experience, creating and maintaining a coherent educational mission, and having high expectations for all students.

Further research suggests effective educational leadership encompasses the ability to provide support for educational efforts and create learning environments that promote professional growth (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2002). Educational leadership also includes the design of educational strategies, supervision and evaluation of programs, and the development of curriculum and graduation requirements (NCREL, 1996). Research by Fink and Resnick (2001) analyzed efforts to develop school administrators into educational leaders in hopes of bringing about positive change in their schools. The five elements of educational leadership that were deemed essential included nested learning communities, principal institutes, leadership for instruction, peer learning, and individual coaching.

Along with effective educational leadership, recent trends have begun to emerge that emphasize teacher centered and alternative supervision and evaluation methods. Involving stakeholders in various leadership roles, including teacher evaluation, helps to create and maintain support for their role as leaders (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). For example, one alternative evaluation method is the use of peer review in which teachers evaluate the teaching strategies of other teachers (Lieberman, 1998).

Connecticut currently uses another method by requiring all teachers to submit a professional portfolio within the first two years of teaching (Larsen, 2005). In addition, numerous states are now able to use data to track teachers and align them to student achievement and outcomes (Keller, 2008). For example, one of the most effective illustrations of this is in Florida where data allow researchers the opportunity to tie student performance to the identity of

their classroom teacher and in turn link teachers to their in-service training, their college coursework and their pre-college entrance exam scores (Harris & Sass, 2007). These emerging trends in research and practice allow policy makers to see where the field of teacher evaluation is heading.

Teacher attrition has grown to nearly 50% of our beginning teacher workforce, with many districts such as Philadelphia losing nearly 70% of all teachers within their first six years on the job (Policy Brief, 2007). Effective supervision and evaluation is the first step towards ensuring that school leaders not only have the right people in the classrooms, but also the right support structures in place in order to retain these most valuable assets (Hirsch, Emerick, Church, & Fuller, 2007). Thus, it is this understanding of the beliefs, practices, training, and education needed for our teachers to impact student outcomes that can serve as the foundation for how school leaders support, evaluate and retain teachers.

School Culture

The relationship between effective teaching and effective leadership is emphasized further in the research surrounding school culture. Among the numerous definitions of school culture, Deal and Peterson (1990) contend that school culture is the "deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of the school's history." Schein (1992) defines culture as a pattern of collective assumptions that a group or organization has learned over the course of time through shared experiences. Peterson (2002) suggests that culture is built within a school over time as teachers, school leaders, parents and students work together and it is the school culture that often influences the staff development and professional growth that takes place within a school.

School culture serves as the foundation for long-term continuous school change and improvement (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Fullan and Steiglebauer (1991) contend that the key

to successful change is not only a change in organizational structure but also more importantly a change in the culture. Through effective change, the culture will be impacted through the use of rites, rituals, recognition of important people and events and formal statements of philosophy (Schein, 1992).

To lead change and bring about lasting school improvement, the culture must be fostered by leaders who encourage collaboration, empower teachers and students and motivate in manner that convinces others to embrace the school's culture (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Valentine, 2001). Sergiovanni (2006) suggests that school culture is influenced both formally and informally by the direct and subtle influence of school leaders hoping to bring about change. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) emphasize the importance of the school leader as one that can have a profound impact on the school culture through actions that develop norms, values, and attitudes among staff. Schein (1992) goes on to further support the importance of leaders in shaping organizational culture in that they create and modify culture and that the management of the culture is what ultimately defines their leadership. In addition, Teske and Schneider (1999) state that an effective principal defines the culture within the school and establishes high standards and integrates those standards into the mission of the school.

Fullan (2001 & 2002) affirms that it is the principal that is the main agent of change within a school and it is only those principals who are equipped to handle a complex, constantly changing environment can implement the initiatives that lead to continuous and sustained improvement in teaching and learning. Leithwood and Janntzi (1990) determined in a comprehensive study examining the strategies of twelve exemplary school leaders in New York City that transformational leaders could create collaborative school cultures and bring about school improvement in a short period of time. Burns (1978) affirms that it is the

transformational leaders that can enable mutual growth and collaboration within an organization. Fullan (2002) further states that there are five distinct elements that describe culture changing principals as those who can possess and demonstrate a moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making.

The impact of school leaders upon the culture is further supported in their role as the representative of and advocate for that culture. Educational leaders modeling the collaboration, professionalism, and vision within a school positively influences the school culture (Fullan, 1988). Leaders should demonstrate in their words, actions, and policies the very ideal and beliefs that they hope to encourage in others and establish within their organization (Kotter, 1996). Schein (1992) emphasizes the importance of a formally stated mission and vision statements. This serves to fortify the school or organization culture and demonstrate the importance of this mission and vision.

The culture within a school also influences student achievement (Levin, 1987). Deal & Peterson (1999), contend that higher achieving schools were those that demonstrated cultures that fostered collaboration, empowerment, and engagement. In contrast, schools with toxic cultures with little stakeholder collaboration were more likely to produce poor academic achievement. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (1998) suggest that successful schools are more capable of increasing student achievement when the culture shares common characteristics including a commitment to the students, respect for shared decision making, a collective belief in the importance of professional growth, collective celebrations of success, and a mission grounded in the ideal that all students can achieve.

This exemplar is considered a collaborative culture where a mutual relationship of growth and understanding is established among school community stakeholders (Barth, 2002). When stakeholders such as teachers, administrators and parents believe that collaboration will lead to improvement in teaching and learning, only then will the culture become collaborative (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). This process takes time and requires continual assessment of the school's progress towards the goals and opportunities for the school community to reflect upon what they are hoping to accomplish (Senge, et al. 1999). Kanter (1992) suggests that this process is augmented by use of symbols and signals and will eventually lead to a cultural change in the structures and processes with a school.

Despite the research demonstrating the virtues of a collaborative culture, many schools continue to have school faculties working in the traditional contexts of teaching and learning because of the perceived presence of obstacles preventing them from collaborating (Dufour, 2004). Yet, it is the schools that have created collaborative cultures that deem such challenges as not insurmountable obstacles, but rather as opportunities for learning and growth (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002; Kanter, 2004; Kotter, 1996). Building a collaborative culture is a ultimately the responsibility of and determined by the will and determination of a school community committed to improving student learning (Barth, 1991; Dufour 2004).

To examine school culture within schools, Valentine and Gruenert (1998) have identified six unique characteristics as elements of school culture. "Professional Development" describes the degree to which teacher's value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. Teachers remain knowledgeable about current and effective practices from workshops, seminars, colleagues, observations, and other professional resources. Continual growth, improvement and learning are the foundation of this component of school culture.

Effective educational leaders support teachers with the resources and opportunity to partake in meaningful professional development (Lumpkin, 2008).

The Unity of Purpose element of school culture describes the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school. This involves an active collaboration amongst parents, teachers, students, support staff, administrators, and the local community toward setting and achieving a common goal. It is these common goals, plans, visions and values that become the focal point of everyone's efforts (Levin, 2001: Kotter 1996: Schein, 1992).

The Collaborative Leadership component describes the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with the school staff. The educational leaders seek the input of the school community, value their ideas, and provide venues for their ideas to be expressed. In addition, collaborative leadership promotes new ideas, new risks and a sense of shared trust that allows for innovation to take place (Byrk & Schneider, 2002).

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. Ideally, teachers throughout a school will work collectively and collaboratively, including such activities as mutual classroom observations, lesson modeling, grade-level and team planning, and evaluation and assessment of teaching practices (Bambino, 2002).

Collegial support details the degree in which teachers work together in an effective and trusting manner. Collegial support may serve as a positive influence upon school culture and student achievement, with the presence of teacher collegiality, mutual respect amongst stakeholders, and a shared responsibility of meeting the needs of students (Blackmore, et al, 1996).

The final essential element of school culture is considered the Learning Partnership. This partnership is the extent in which school community stakeholders (parents, teachers, students) collaborate and work collectively for the common good of the schools. The partnership also entails a shared vision amongst school community partners, a belief in shared responsibility, and meaning activities that foster opportunities for connectivity and whole school improvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Fullan, 1999; Schein, 1992).

Student Outcomes

The factors of school culture, teacher quality, and educational leadership individually and collectively influence student achievement and teacher working conditions. Yet, student attendance, both voluntary and through the use of suspensions, has become an increasingly influential predictor of student success (Ali & Dufresne, 2008; Landin, 1996, Roby 2004). Not surprisingly, students with excessive absences rates characteristically receive lower grades and standardized test scores than those with higher attendance rates (Dufour, 1983; Roby, 2004).

Attendance

Students have to be present and engaged in order to learn. It may seem to be common sense, but quite often, absenteeism, especially in early grades is often overlooked. Romero and Chang (2008) contend that throughout the early elementary years, children are obtaining basic social and academic skills essential to ongoing academic success and unless students attain these basic skills by third grade, they often require extra help to catch up and are at an increased risk of eventually dropping out of school. Thus, children who are chronically absent in kindergarten have the lowest performance in reading, mathematics, and general knowledge in 1st grade (Jacobson, 2008).

Furthermore, a recent study of school-level attendance rates showed a significant relationship between school-level SES and school-level annual daily attendance (Reardon, 2008).

This relationship between attendance and student achievement is even more pronounced when examining at-risk and minority students. Ali and Dufresne (2008) contend that the children who are most likely to be excluded from school are also the ones who are least able to afford to fall behind. A Minnesota study of public school student achievement and attendance data found that boosting student attendance by as little as one percent could significantly increase test scores of minority students (Roby, 2004). In a recent study by Reardon (2008) examining the relationship between school-level socio-economic status and school-level annual daily attendance, demonstrated that the highest poverty schools exhibited the highest excessive absence rates. Thus, minority and high poverty students may have the most to gain with increased attendance.

One example of this glaring issue are data published in a study by the Center for New York City Affairs (Jacobson, 2008) which revealed that more than 90,000 of New York City's elementary school students, nearly 20% of the student population, missed at least a month of classes during the last school year. The most acute absentee problems were found in central Brooklyn, Harlem and the South Bronx, and were as high as 40% in many middle and high schools (Medina, 2008).

Districts have begun to address student absenteeism because budgets for most school districts are based on average daily attendance. High absenteeism rates can result in the loss of state and federal funds (N.W.R.E.L., 2004). Recently, the problem of excessive student absences has become so paramount for educators at the state and local levels that legislation has recently been proposed to confront the issue. The Increasing Student Achievement through School Attendance Act (2008) was introduced to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, establishing grants to increase student attendance. This bill will empower the Secretary of Education to award grants to local educational agencies, states, for the implementation of

innovative measures to increase school attendance by preventing student truancy, suspension, and expulsion. The ultimate goals of the program are to increase collaboration between school systems, the legal system, child welfare agencies, and community-based organizations. To reduce excessive absences there is also professional training school for school personnel in student behavior modification and drop out prevention.

There are numerous strategies to address the issue of excessive absence and high attendance rates in school. One such factor is increasing student engagement, which results in increased attendance rates (Railsback, 2004). Techniques for increasing student attendance also include the use of mentoring programs, community outreach, culturally responsive teaching and learning environment, smaller class sizes, service learning, and increased focus during learning time (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Railsback, 2004). Reardon (2008) further suggests the development of individualized attendance policies for schools with disproportionately high numbers of low socio-economic status students to meet their diverse needs and afford them increased autonomy rather than being blanketed by generic district policies.

Suspensions

Schools and teachers cannot help children reach their academic goals if the students are not in school (Ali & Dufresne, 2008, Railsback, 2004). One significant factor that influences student attendance and student achievement is student suspensions. The most common form of suspension is out of school suspensions, which is the removal of a student from the school environment for a period not to exceed ten days. Typically, school suspension is intended as a punishment with the primary goal of suspension being to diminish or eliminate the likelihood that a student or students repeats that offense (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Mellard & Seybert, 1996).

Out-of-school student suspensions can have wide-ranging, detrimental effects on both the individual and the school community including increased student dropout rates, homelessness and crime (Arthur, et al. 2002; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Ali and Dufresne (2008) report that suspensions may increase the likelihood of involvement in the juvenile justice system, as children and youth who are sent home from school often remain unsupervised when their parents work. Students who are suspended are also less likely to graduate from high school as they seek to avoid the setting where castigation and punishment is being administered (Railsback, 2004). Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) further contend that adults who were frequently absent or suspended as teenagers are much more likely than those who were not to have poorer health and mental health, lower paying jobs, an increased chance of living in poverty, and more reliance on welfare support.

Beyond the effects of the use of suspension in schools on learning outcomes, suspensions may also prove to be an ineffective method of preventing school discipline issues (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Craven, 2008). Suspension excludes students from school property and school activities, yet offers no real strategies or actions to further preventing repeat infractions. Ali and Dufresne (2008) in a report called “Missing Out: Suspending Students from Connecticut Schools” examined student suspension rates and policies and determined that many contradicted the intended nature of suspension as a punishment and to deter students from future infractions. For example, one district was suspending students who skipped school by suspending those students; punishing students who stayed home by forcing students to stay home (Craven, 2008). Suspension policies, ultimately, should be designed, implemented, and evaluated based upon the academic and social needs of students.

Student suspension data has also created much controversy in the demographics of the students being suspended. A disproportional number of minority students, male students, and special education students receive out-of school suspensions (Constenbader & Markson, 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 1999; Wu, et al, 1982). A study of middle school student punishment practices by Skiba, Michael, Nardo and Peterson (2002) exposed a differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African-American students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation. A study by Bowman (2006) of the suspension practices of schools in Kentucky found that African American students are suspended from school two to 17 times as often as whites in some districts. These issues further highlight the significance student suspensions and the reduction thereof can play upon school success and student achievement.

School Improvement Initiatives

Schools are changing constantly, yet unless it is determined what schools need to improve, that change will do little to enhance teaching and learning (Elmore, 2000). The aim of this research is to determine the factors that may contribute most to effective teaching, positive school culture and student achievement. The data will ultimately help to shape school improvement and reform initiatives meant to improve the teaching and learning that takes place in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fullan, 1999). Furthermore, by analyzing a variety of reform variables (i.e. teacher quality, culture, educational leaders, etc.) it will allow policy makers the opportunity to develop customized reform initiatives that are best suited for individual schools and districts (Fullan, 2001).

Reform and improvement initiatives have begun to enable schools to change the way they teach, the way students learn, and the way they are led. Recent data emerging from the Washington DC public schools shows how school reform initiatives have been credited with

decreasing the achievement gap and helping to become a vital part of revitalizing the city as a whole (Glod & deVise, 2008; Turque, 2008). Research by Borman et al., (2003) discovered that schools enacting comprehensive school reform and improvement programs exhibited significant gains in terms of student gains. Darling Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) contend that these initiatives impact student achievement by enhancing teaching methods. The focus on teacher professional development is a vital component of education reform initiatives (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 1999). The ultimate goal of comprehensive school is to transform the current professional development and organizational learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998).

The importance of the role of professional development is supported by a recent study of schools in North Carolina which determined that teacher professional development was the greatest predictor of whether or not middle schools met their student achievement growth target on the state assessment (Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2004). When teachers have the increased knowledge of effective teaching strategies, then they are far more likely to transfer that knowledge into increased student outcomes (Ladson-Billings & Darling-Hammond, 2000)

School improvement initiatives enhance traditional educator professional development by helping teachers to assess and evaluate their practice instead of merely supporting the acquisition of knowledge and skills for teachers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Assessment of teaching and learning practices should not be used merely to evaluate schools but rather as an assessment for learning (Stiggins, 2004).

Assessment and evaluation of current practices is essential to understand what the school community perceives as strengths, weaknesses, and a shared understanding of what the school needs to improve (Bernhardt, 1994). Reeves (2003) contends that lasting school improvement and reform initiatives require the use of frequent common assessments with multiple

opportunities for improvement and feedback to both teacher and student. Dufour (2004) contends that common formative assessments will become a catalyst for enhanced teaching and learning practices. Frequent and formative assessments play a particularly positive role in the learning of low achievers (Black, 1998). These frequent, common formative assessments will allow teachers the opportunity to identify how his or her students performed on each skill compared with other students (Collins, 2001; Reeves, 2003).

School improvement initiatives also enable schools to develop new roles and expectations in relation to student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). As noted previously in this work, attendance is a paramount student outcome. Reform initiatives and programs that are meant to enhance teaching and learning will lead to very little student improvement if the children are not in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005; Scribner, et al., 1999)

Another vital component of school reform and improvement initiatives is the use of data to drive decision making (Barry, et al., 2005; Bernhardt, 2003; McLeod, 2007) The focus on data is also reinforced by the work of Bernhardt who suggest that through the use of data hunches, ineffective practices, and achievement gaps may be replaced with root causes of problems, constant improvement, and effective usage of resources. Kanter (2004) states “data helps to ensure that people get the information they need so as to guide their own performance and hold others—and the system—to high standards”(p. 334).

Student outcomes will also improve if data is gathered, analyzed, and utilized as a teaching tool to meet the needs of students (Kanter, 2004). Data analysis is about making informed decisions to benefit students by predicting and preventing failures and predicting and ensuring success (Bernhardt, 2004, McLeod, 2008). With data we have the knowledge to know the what, who, when, where, and how the teaching and learning is taking place in our schools and it allows

us to develop informed decisions on how to best serve our educators and children. Data is the key for bringing about lasting change in our schools and is essential for bringing about improvement in the teaching and learning that takes place in our schools.

Reeves (2003) demonstrates how important data can be especially in schools that have the potential for failure. His study detailed the schools with 90% free and reduced lunch, 90% minority student population, and 90% student achievement. The demographic data from these schools mirrors a high percentage of the schools being examined within this study (FLDOE, 2008). One of the numerous commonalities the “90, 90, 90” schools demonstrated in breaking the mold and succeeding despite many obstacles was the use of frequent feedback to the student and teacher (Reeves, 2003). The continuous cycle of gathering, analyzing, sharing, and collectively using data for growth is a key to successful school improvement and reform (Fullan, 2001).

The use of data is currently a hallmark of the school improvement initiatives being implemented through the Laster Center for Learning. The professional development and reform goals are based on the outcomes (vision) they hope to achieve, which, in turn, are based on the data they have gathered (Kanter, 2004; McLeod, 2007). The data that is gathered is intended to analyze multiple measures including school processes, demographics and perceptions held by those within the school community (Collins, 2001; Bernhardt, 2004; Reeves, 2003; Schein, 1992). Effective school reform is based on the specific goals and needs of the school and not a generic baseline. Data is used to establish where they are; where they need to be, and ultimately, how do we get there.

Within this research, the measures suggested by Bernhardt (2004) have been utilized for effective examination of the context within the study. The first factor is the demographics within

a school such as enrollment, attendance, dropout rate, ethnicity, gender, grade level, and socio-economic status. This enables the researcher to conceptualize the problem and detail what variables are in play and isolate the parameters involved. The next measure is perceptions held by those within the school community (Kanter, 2004; Fullan, 2001). This examines the perceptions of the learning environment, values, beliefs, attitudes, and observations (Goleman, 2002). This also helps us to identify the problems within a school by gauging where the school community assumes there might be issues (Kotter, 1996).

Often, these different types of data are looked at individually. However, it is essential that they be used collectively to effectively use the data to bring about positive school improvement. For example, the overlap of “Demographics” and “Perceptions” allows school reform initiatives to determine the perceptions held by certain sub groups within a school faculty (Bernhardt, 2004). In relation to this research, these ideals support the examination of demographics such as attendance rates and teacher quality characteristics and perceptions gauged by the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998).

With increased teacher reflection, data and assessment to drive decision making, and shared responsibility for student achievement a new paradigm of school communities has emerged. Supporting this new standard of change is that of professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004). Establishing true professional learning communities requires professional development and continual growth to be integrated into the school structures as well as the culture (Kanter, 2004; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2007). Ultimately, the professional learning community can serve as model for school improvement and reform initiatives, one that encompasses beliefs and practices to ensure that all students can learn, stakeholders (including district level and community) may work collectively, barriers to success will be overcome, and

that the school community should work persistently to improve teaching and learning (Barth, 1991; Dufour, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Marzano, 2003). Then, and only then, can enduring success be achieved (Collins, 2001).

Synthesis of Literature

The examination of the relevant literature reveals the significant influence of the student attendance and suspension rates and the impact these “output” variables have upon student achievement, especially among high poverty and minority students. Furthermore, the two “processes” components (school culture and educational leadership) positively correlate to improved student learning and enhanced teacher-working conditions. The input variables examined the characteristics of effective teaching and included teacher experience, teaching within field, and possessing teacher certification. The research offered an abundant number of studies but lacked a cohesive determination of which characteristics specifically led to increased student achievement. This may be attributed to the research that suggests that the characteristics of teacher quality that matter the most are the most difficult to evaluate (Walsh, 1997). Finally, the analysis of comprehensive school reform initiatives revealed the importance of the variables used within this performance framework and their influence upon significant and lasting school improvement.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a mixed method study, the research utilizes a statistical survey and statistical modeling perspective. The research methods utilized to collect data included the use of surveys and interviews with exemplary educational leaders. The data will serve to determine the nature of the relationship between school outputs, processes and inputs. The purpose of the study is to determine if teacher quality characteristics, educational leadership practices and school culture influence student attendance and suspension rates. The questions and related hypotheses addressed by this study will include:

1. Is there a relationship between the characteristics of teacher quality and student attendance and suspension rates?
2. Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality?
3. Is there a strong relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates?
4. What are the practices of educational leaders that contribute to a collaborative school culture?

Null Hypotheses

Ho1: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates.

Ho2: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality

(the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school).

Ho3: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates.

Ho4: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates.

Ho5: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school).

Ho6: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates.

The Research Context

Data were obtained for the 2008-2009 school year from 50 elementary schools in Florida. The research activities covered a two-month data collection period, from October 1, 2008 until December 1, 2008. Sample schools were selected based upon their participation in a statewide school improvement program directed by the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida. The Lastinger Center focuses on improving academic achievement by enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, and leadership in elementary schools throughout the state. The goal of the Lastinger Center for Learning is to offer comprehensive and continuous support to

these schools as they work towards enhanced teacher efficacy and improved student achievement. These goals are addressed through the use of job-embedded professional development, teacher inquiry, collaborative culture building practices, and the use of data to help shape school policies. Using the school as the unit of analysis, data were obtained from each of the 50 schools participating in these school reform initiatives.

The Lastinger Center for Learning is currently working with numerous districts throughout the state of Florida. These districts represent a variety of characteristics including large urban areas such as Duval County, Pinellas County and Miami-Dade County, the fourth largest school district in the nation. Their partnerships in the state of Florida target schools in urban districts with high poverty rates as determined by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches (Figure 3-1).

The Research Participants

Demographic data provides a context for the schools participating in the study (Bernhardt, 1994). Specifically, teacher demographics examined years experience, teacher advanced degrees, teacher certification and teaching in the field in which they are trained. The participants were represented by 50 elementary schools in the four districts of Alachua, Collier, Duval, and Miami-Dade. The school demographic data were obtained from the Florida Department of Education School Indicators Report (2007) and represented student data from the 2006-2007 school year. The data trends, although not detailing the current year, give a context to the participant schools in terms of the demographics and characteristics of the teaching faculty.

The school data analysis revealed the following data in relation to the sample schools and their faculty. As indicated in the first chapter, the sample population was described as schools from districts with a student population typically from low socio-economic backgrounds. Within the sample, the student population demographic data revealed a significantly higher percentage

of students from high –poverty backgrounds (determined by the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch) than averages at the state and national level (Figure 3-1).

The exemplary school principals participating in the interviews were selected because of the results their schools achieved participating in the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) during the 2008-2009 school year. The three principals (Principals A, B, & C) selected achieved the highest average combined score of the six components of a collaborative school culture. Two of the principals were from the Miami-Dade school district and the third was from Alachua County. Each principal participated in a phone interview where the responses were transcribed electronically and recorded (Appendix D). The six questions were based upon characteristics and strategies associated with each of the six components of a collaborative school culture (Appendix C). All interviews were voluntary and anonymous and were conducted after school to decrease the amount of possible distractions during the interview process.

To further provide context for the research, an examination of the current suspension and excessive absence rates data is provided to compare the sample population with the state of Florida averages (Figure 3-2). The teacher demographics were also examined to compare the sample schools with the state averages. The teacher demographic data revealed 11.8 years of average teaching experience, 36.7% with advanced degrees, 7% without certification and 3.7% teaching out-of-field (Figure 3-3). Finally, an examination of the student free-and-reduced lunch rates amongst the sample population and the state and national averages is provided (Figure 3-1).

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The School Culture Survey

To evaluate the culture within each school, the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) was utilized (Appendix A). This instrument was employed to gauge the faculty

of their individual perceptions of the school and organizational culture. The School Culture Survey evaluates the perceptions of school faculty (teachers, administrators, etc.) in relation to six unique factors related to school culture. The six factors include professional development, the unity of purpose, collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, collegial support, and learning partnership.

Professional Development describes the degree to which teacher's value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. Teachers remain knowledgeable about current and effective practices from workshops, seminars, colleagues, observations, and other professional resources. Continual growth, improvement and learning are the foundation of this component of school culture. Effective educational leaders support teachers with the resources and opportunity to partake in meaningful professional development (Lumpkin, 2008).

The Unity of Purpose element of school culture describes the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school. This involves an active collaboration amongst parents, teachers, students, support staff, administrators, and the local community toward setting and achieving a common goal. It is these common goals, plans, visions and values that become the focal point of everyone's efforts (Levin, 2001; Kotter 1996; Schein, 1992).

The Collaborative Leadership component describes the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with the school staff. The educational leaders seek the input of the school community, value their ideas, and provide venues for their ideas to be expressed. In addition, collaborative leadership promotes new ideas, new risks and a sense of shared trust that allows for innovation to take place (Byrk & Schneider, 2002).

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.

Ideally, teachers throughout a school will work collectively and collaboratively, including such activities as mutual classroom observations, lesson modeling, grade-level and team planning, and evaluation and assessment of teaching practices (Bambino, 2002).

Collegial Support details the degree in which teachers work together in an effective and trusting manner. In addition, for collegial support to be a positive influence upon school culture and student achievement, presence of teacher collegiality, mutual respect amongst stakeholders, and a shared responsibility of meeting the needs of students (Blackmore, et al, 1996).

The final essential element of school culture is considered the Learning Partnership. This partnership is the extent in which school community stakeholders (parents, teachers, students) collaborate and work collectively for the common good of the schools. The partnership also entails a shared vision amongst school community partners, a belief in shared responsibility, and meaningful activities that foster opportunities for connectivity and whole school improvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Fullan, 1999; Schein, 1992).

The data from the School Culture Survey are essential to evaluate the current school culture as perceived by the faculty and to establish goals related to the specific needs revealed in the analysis. This instrument also affords the school community the opportunity to examine which elements of school culture may be directly impacting student achievement and teacher working conditions. For this particular research, the culture survey serves to examine the processes at the school level and their role influencing student outputs or outcomes.

The School Culture Survey factors have been established as reliable and each individual factor measures a unique aspect of the schools collaborative culture. The survey includes 35 questions and each individual school culture factor is delineated by item in Appendix B. Measured using Chronbach's Alpha Reliability (1998), the Collaborative Leadership reliability is

.910. The Teacher Collaboration factor reliability is .834. The Professional Development factor is .821 and Collegial Support is .867. The Unity of purpose factor is reliable at .796 and the Learning Partnership Factor is .658.

Exemplar Interviews

The final piece of data collection included interviews of exemplary school leaders. In terms of factors that influence school performance and student achievement, the role of the school principal has emerged as critical (Fullan, 1999, Elmore, 2000; Leithwood, 2000). Much of the relevant literature has focused on how principals go about improving the effectiveness of their schools yet few studies have directly asked the principals what they perceived their role to be in the school improvement equation (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). This research will serve as a guide to improve future practice, as the principal is the key to success in virtually all school ventures (Quinn, 2002). By learning about the strategies and educational leadership styles utilized by these administrators, this study will inform principals, policy makers, and district personnel in ways to effectively bring about positive school change and lasting school improvement.

These exemplary school principals were selected because of the results of the School Culture Survey. The work by Teske and Schneider (1999) in their comprehensive examination of model school principals in the New York public school system, serves as the model for this methodology. Their research helped to examine the impact effective educational leaders had upon school culture, school reform, and student achievement. They contend that the one essential commonality amongst successful schools is effective and consistent leadership by school principals over time (Teske and Schneider, 1999). The researchers further argue that this type of consistent and long-term leadership is crucial to school reform, especially in urban districts, where turnover is commonplace.

The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and examined the educational leaders' perceptions of his or her role pertaining to school culture, improving teaching and learning, data driven decision making, and the use of supplemental educational resources to increase student engagement. Interview questions (Appendix C) were created based on the six components of school culture as determined by Gruenert and Valentine (1998). The qualitative data were examined to discover common themes, practices and characteristics of these exemplary leaders, which helped them in contributing to the commendable student and teacher data.

Procedures Used

To determine the statistical relationship between the student outcome variables and school culture and teacher quality characteristics, a performance framework was utilized. A performance framework (Figure 1-1) may be conceptualized as having three main parts: inputs, processes, and outputs (Rouse & Putterill, 2003). The "inputs" construct was operationalized by four variables reported in the Florida School Indicators Report (2008): a measure of the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, teacher certification rates and the average years of experience for teachers within a school.

"Processes" refer to pedagogical development and practice in and outside of the classroom. Examples include the nature of collaboration with peers, administrator evaluations, and professional development activities. Aggregated at the school level, these variables form the heart of educational leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Dart, 1990). The "process" construct was operationalized by variables obtained from Gruenert and Valentine's (1998) School Culture Survey.

The “outputs” construct was operationalized by both student absences and suspensions as reported by the Florida Department of Education’s Florida School Indicators Report (2008). Specifically, student absence data reflected the percentage of a school’s population that was absent 21 or more days. Suspension data reflected the percentage of a school’s population suspended outside of school during the 180-day academic school year. This percentage utilized an unduplicated-headcount to ensure the same student was not counted twice (Florida School Indicators Report, 2008).

The process for gathering the data required a collaborative effort between the participating schools and the Lastinger Center. The schools were sent a letter of introduction from the researchers describing the process and the objectives and goals associated with the data collection. The processes for the data collection were also explained in detail to the school administration. From there, each participating school had a University of Florida staff or faculty member providing ongoing support in the school to ensure proper data collection. This person is known to the school staff and has been present in the school on a consistent basis. For example, Miami-Dade Schools have two full-time University of Florida support specialists assigned to conduct training workshops, provide ongoing professional support, and support the schools’ ongoing reform efforts.. The completion of the school culture survey was conducted both in paper form and electronically based on the decision of the school principal. Throughout the data collection process, teachers remained anonymous to ensure validity. The sample population achieved an average participation rate of 64% from instructional faculty.

Data Analysis

School Culture Surveys and Student Outcome Data

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to determine the proportion of the variance associated with the dependent variables. The dependent variables

in this research project are student attendance percentages within a school (quantified by the percentage of excessive absences, 21 or more days) and student suspension percentages (quantified by the percentage of students receiving out-of-school suspensions). The independent variables are the measurable teacher quality characteristics (**the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, teacher certification rates and the average years of experience for teachers within a school**) and the **school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey including collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose and learning partnership**. Pearson's correlation was utilized to examine the correlational relationships addressed in Ho1-Ho3. Stepwise regression was employed to address the predictive relationships being examined for Ho4-Ho6. Stepwise regression was utilized in lieu of other methods, including forward entry regression, due to the fact there lacked a theoretical framework to use as a model for determining a particular order of entry.

In both models, assumptions of linearity, normality, independence and equal conditional variances were checked utilizing scatter and residual plots (Ruiz-Primo & Shavelson, 1996). Tolerance and variance inflation factors methods were applied to check for collinearity. Cook's Distance and DFBETA's were calculated to check for the influence of data points on the analysis. The decision to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis was based upon a significance level of .05. Non-directional hypotheses were employed in the analysis, as significance, either positive or negative, was of interest to the researchers.

Exemplar Interviews

To begin analyzing the interview data, the raw transcripts were transcribed. From there, the text from the participant responses were examined to identify common themes or categories

of responses based on the characteristics of Collaborative School Cultures as delineated by Gruenert and Valentine (1998):

Collaborative Leadership
Teacher Collaboration
Professional Development
Unity of Purpose
Collegial Support
Learning Partnership

Next, the sample categories were tested as viable options, using the first half of each interview to categorize responses. The participant responses demonstrated multiple occurrences and examples of each school culture characteristic. Therefore, after establishing these definitive and viable categories, the coded responses were recorded.

Along with comprehensive coding, this research also required the summarization of the participant responses and narratives. By using the most significant sections to exemplify the key points in each principal's interview, the summaries offered concise and manageable insight into complex and often cumbersome strategies and techniques. Following the interview analysis and creation of narrative summaries, the coded responses were examined in relation to Gruenert and Valentine's (1998) Characteristics of School Culture.

Summary of the Methodology

This chapter explained the methods to be used in this mixed methods study of the relationships and influence of input and processes data in relation to outputs. The factors associated with school culture, teacher quality, and characteristics of effective school leadership and their respective influence upon student outcomes were thoroughly analyzed. Interviews with exemplar school leaders augment the quantitative data by lending context and proven strategies for creating collaborative school culture, engaged teaching and learning, and improved student achievement. The next chapter presents the results obtained through the use of these methods.

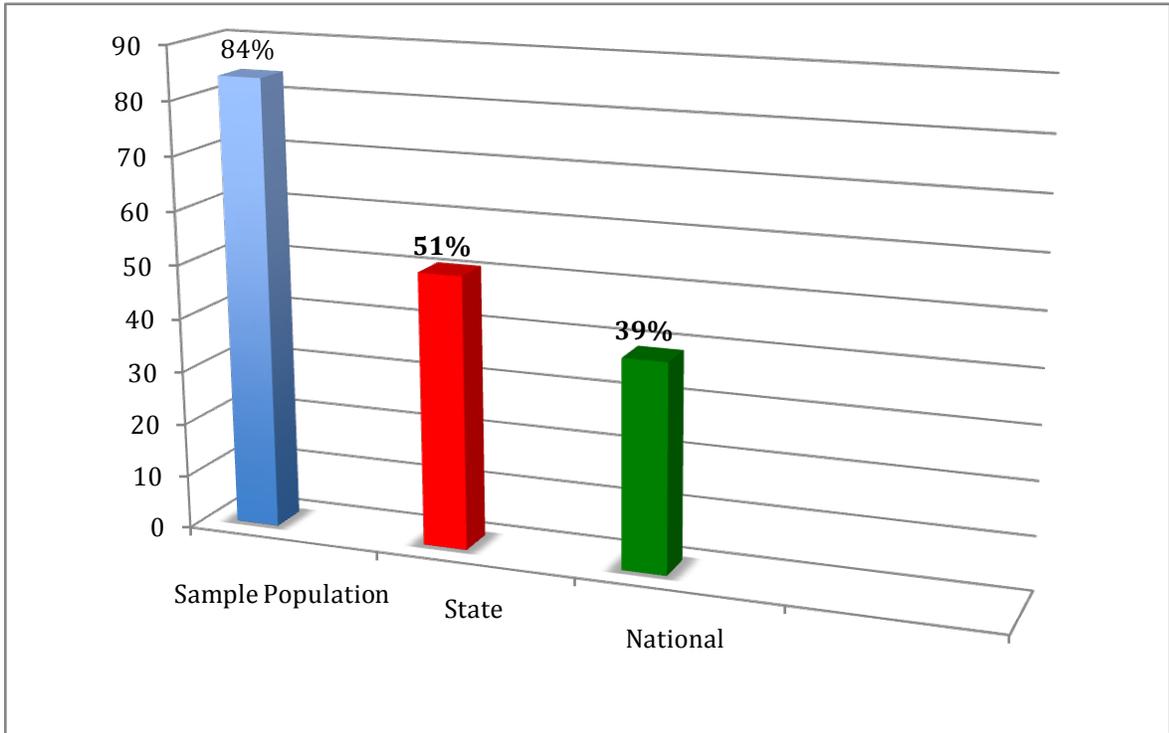


Figure 3-1 Free and reduced lunch student population: sample, state, and national. (FLDOE, 2007; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007)

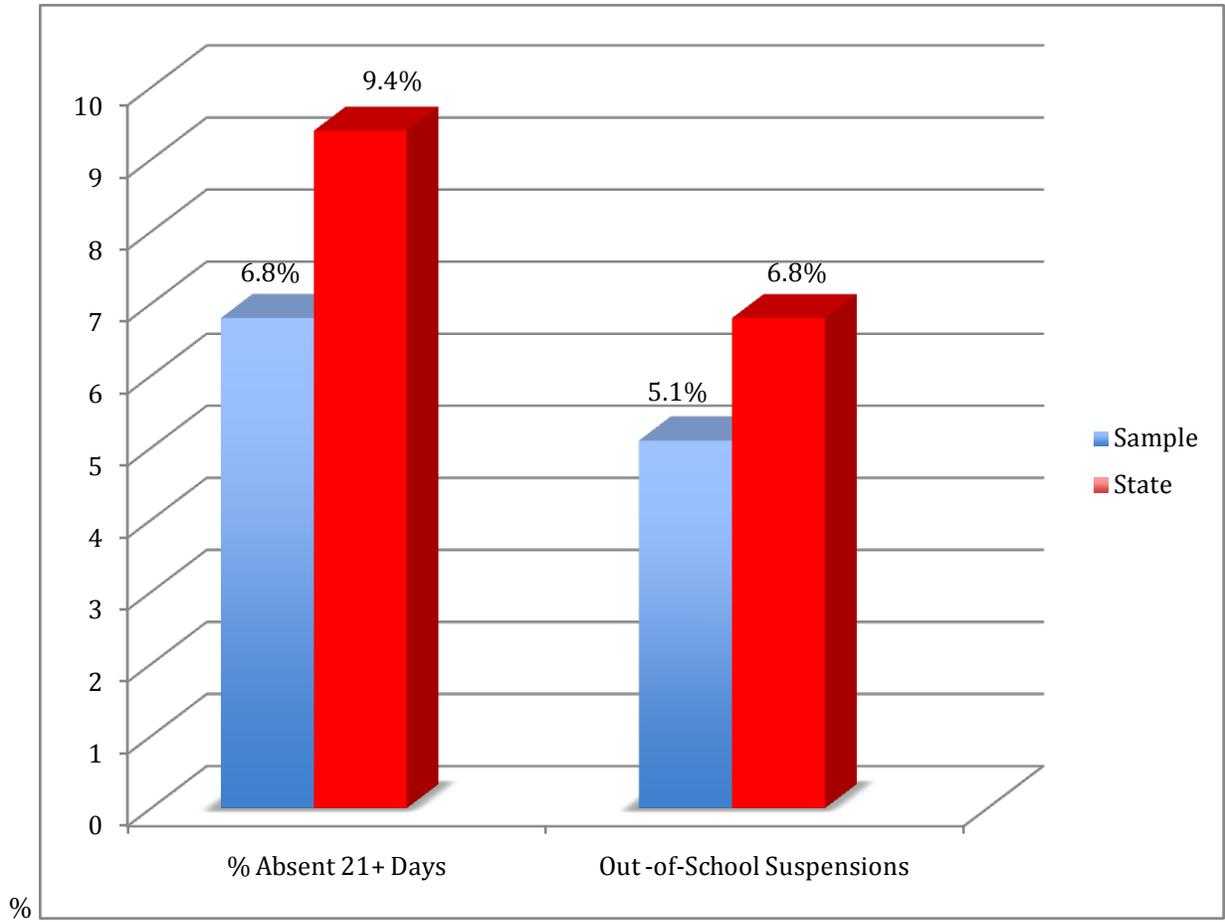


Figure 3-2 Student outcome data: sample and state (FLDOE, 2007)

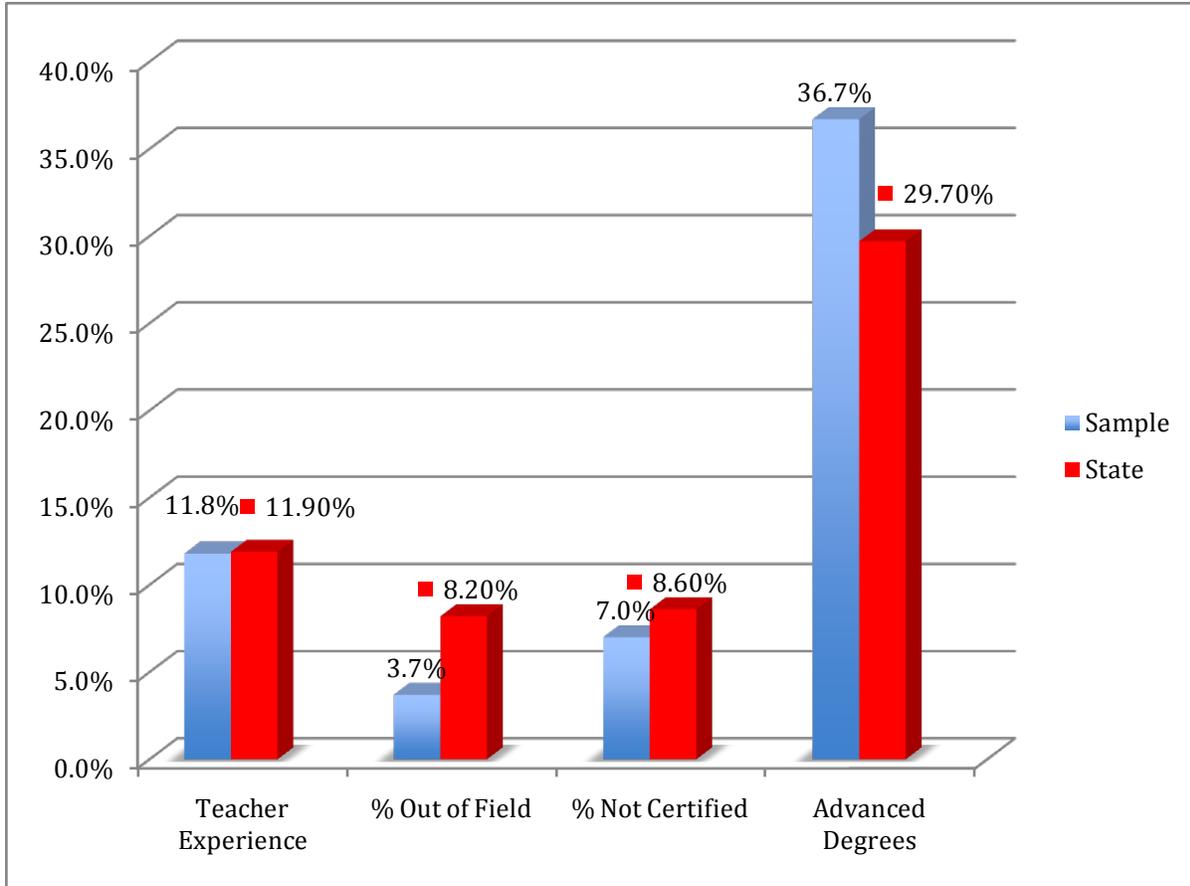


Figure 3-3 Teacher demographics: sample and state. (FLDOE, 2008)

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This study examined in detail the relationship among the characteristics of teacher quality, the components of a collaborative school culture, and their influence upon student outcomes. The research results are categorized based upon the data found within the performance framework and the exemplar interviews.

Performance Framework

The School Culture Survey was administered to instructional faculty in the sample population of 50 schools with 1657 total responses. Using the school as the unit of analysis, the average response rate within each school was 66%. Specifically, the performance framework data were examined to address the following research questions and null hypotheses:

1. Is there a relationship between the characteristics of teacher quality and student attendance and suspension rates?
2. Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality?
3. Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates?

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to determine the proportion of the variance associated with the variables. Pearson correlations were utilized to indicate the strength of the linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Stepwise multiple regressions were employed to examine the predictive associations and effects between the school culture survey factors, the teacher quality characteristic data, and the student outcome dependent variables. In both models, assumptions of linearity, normality, independence and equal conditional variances were checked utilizing scatter and residual plots (Ruiz-Primo & Shavelson, 1996). Tolerance and variance inflation factors methods were applied to check for

collinearity. The decision to reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis was based upon a type I error rate of .05. Non-directional hypotheses were employed in the analysis, as significance, either positive or negative, was of interest to the researchers

To begin addressing the research questions and null hypotheses, correlational and regression analysis was performed with the dependent variable as excessive student absences, quantified by 21 or more days absentee percentage within each school. It was determined that the influence of outliers was not present, as all independent variables were within the acceptable ranges, thereby maintaining the sample size at 50 schools (Figure 4-1). Descriptive statistics were examined to determine the mean and standard deviation (Table 4-1). Pearson correlations between students with 21 or more absences and the independent variables were utilized to demonstrate the relationships between the variables (Table 4-2).

The model summary (Table 4-4) determined the R (.564), the R square (.319), adjusted R square (.144), and the standard error of the estimate (4.156) with excessive absence percentage as the dependent variable. The analysis of variance (Table 4-5) revealed an F value of 1.823 with significance at .089. Multiple regressions, with excessive student absences as the dependent variable, determined that there were no significant predictive relationships between the dependent and independent variables at the .05 level (Figure 4-3).

To examine the relationships and predictive associations of the independent variables upon the second student outcome, correlational and regression analysis were performed with the dependent variable as out-of-school suspension percentage within a school. It was determined that the influence of outliers was not present, as all independent variables were within the acceptable ranges, thereby maintaining the sample size at 50 schools (Figure 4-2). Descriptive statistics, presented in Table 4-6, indicate the dispersion of scores and percentages for the

dependent and independent variables. The model summary (Table 4-9) determined the R (.786), the R square (.618), the adjusted R square (.520), and the standard error of the estimate (2.558). The analysis of variance (Table 4-10) displays the F of 6.311 with significance at .000. Pearson correlations (Table 4-7) were then used to determine the relationships between the independent variables with the student suspension percentages within a school as the dependent variables.

Multiple regressions between a school's percentage of out-of-school suspensions and the ten independent variables were significant at the 0.05 level. The variables that showed significance at this level were teacher collaboration (.041), out-of-field percentage (.000), and teachers without certification percentages (.001). These results (Table 4-8) also demonstrate that of those variables that are significant, there are predictive associations between the independent and dependent variables. For example, for each one-point increase in the teacher collaboration factor from the school culture survey, the model predicated that school suspensions were observed to decrease by 6.709%. Furthermore, as the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school increased by one percentage point, the model predicted that the percentage of students suspended out-of-school would decrease by 0.162%. Conversely, as the percentage of uncertified teachers within a school increased by one percentage point, the model predicted that the percentage of student suspensions would increase by .222%.

In conclusion, the performance framework data were examined to address the following null hypotheses:

Ho1: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced-degrees, teacher certification rates and the

average years of teaching experience within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates.

The null hypothesis was rejected as the Pearson correlations demonstrated significant (1 tailed- significant at .05 or below) relationships amongst the following teacher quality characteristics and the suspension rate dependent variables: Positive Correlation between Teachers without certification and suspension rates (.624), Negative Correlation between Out-of-Field teachers and suspension rates (-.265), Negative correlation between Teachers with advanced degrees and suspension rates (-.368).

The correlations failed to show significant relationships between years teaching experience and suspension rates. The correlations also failed to show any significant correlations between the characteristics of teacher quality and the student attendance dependent variable.

Ho2: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey (collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose and learning partnership), and characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, teacher certification rates and the average years of experience for teachers within a school).

The null hypothesis was rejected as the Pearson correlations demonstrated significant (1 tailed- significant at .05 or below) relationships amongst the teacher quality characteristics and the school culture factors including: A positive correlation between Advanced Degrees and Professional Development (.236), a positive correlation between Advanced Degrees and the Unity of Purpose factor(.262), a positive correlation between Advanced Degrees and the

Collegial Support factor(.348), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Collaborative Leadership factor (-.423), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Professional Development factor (-.365), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Unity of Purpose Factor (-.481), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Collegial Support factor (-.418), and a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Learning Partnership factor (-.293).

Ho3: There are no statistically significant correlational relationships school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey (collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose and learning partnership), and student attendance and suspension rates.

The null hypothesis was rejected as the data revealed numerous significant (1 tailed-significant at .05 or below) correlations between the school culture factors and the dependent variables including: a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Collaborative Leadership factor (-.315), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Professional Development factor (-.370), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Unity of Purpose factor (-.444), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Collegial Support factor (-.354), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Learning Partnership factor (-.473).

The correlations between the Teacher Collaboration independent variable and the student attendance dependent variable were not significant.

In addition, the Pearson correlations revealed the following negative correlations between the student suspension percentage dependent variables and all of the school culture factors

including: Collaborative Leadership (-.470), Teacher Collaboration (-.284), Professional Development (-.403), Unity of Purpose (-.428), Collegial Support (-.434), and Learning Partnership (-.320).

Ho4: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, teacher certification rates and the average years of experience for teachers within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates.

The null hypothesis was rejected because the student suspension dependent variable showed significance with two of the input independent variables at the .01 level. The factors include the out-of-field teaching percentage (.000) and teachers without certification percentages (.001). The model predicted that with each one-point incremental increase for the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school, the observed number of suspensions would decrease by .162%. Then, as the percentage of non-certified teachers within a school increased, the model predicted that student suspensions would increase by .222% (table 4-8).

Ho5: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey (collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose and learning partnership), and characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school).

The null hypothesis was accepted as the performance framework model revealed no significant predictive associations between the factors of school culture and the characteristics of teacher quality at the .05 level (Tables 4-3 & 4-8).

Ho6: There are no statistically significant predictive relationships between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey (collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial support, unity of purpose and learning partnership), and student attendance and suspension rates.

The null hypothesis was rejected as the student suspension dependent variable showed significance with the teacher collaboration variable (.041) at the .05 level (Table 4-8). The model predicted that as the teacher collaboration factor within the school culture survey increased, student suspensions would decrease by 6.709%.

Exemplar Interviews

Interviews were conducted to examine the strategies and practices utilized by exemplar school principals to augment the data and better inform practice. Specifically, the principal interviews were aimed at addressing the following research question:

What are the practices of educational leaders that contribute to a collaborative school culture? In terms of factors that influence school performance and student achievement, the role of the school principal has emerged as critical (Fullan, 1999, Elmore, 2000; Leithwood, 2000). Much of the relevant literature has focused on how principals go about improving the effectiveness of their schools yet few studies have directly asked the principals what they perceived their role to be in the school improvement equation (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). This research serves as a guide to improve future practice, as the principal is the key to success in virtually all school ventures (Quinn, 2002). The qualitative data were examined to discover common themes, practices and characteristics of these exemplary leaders, which helped

them in contributing to the commendable student and teacher data. By learning about the strategies and educational leadership styles utilized by these administrators, this study will inform principals, policy makers, and district personnel in ways to effectively bring about positive school change and lasting school improvement.

The work by Teske and Schneider (1999) in their comprehensive examination of model school principals in the New York public school system, serves as the model for this methodology. Their research helped to examine the role effective educational leaders had upon school culture, school reform, and student achievement. They contend that the one essential commonality amongst successful schools is effective and consistent leadership by schools principals over time (Teske and Schneider, 1999). The researchers further argue that this type of consistent and long-term leadership is crucial to school reform, especially in urban districts, where turnover is so commonplace.

The exemplary school principals participating in the interviews were selected because of the results their schools achieved participating in the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998) during the 2008-2009 school year. The three principals (Principals A, B, & C) selected achieved the highest average combined score of the six components of a collaborative school culture. Two of the principals were from the Miami-Dade school district and the third was from Alachua County. Each principal participated in a phone interview where the responses were transcribed electronically and recorded (Appendix D). The six questions were based upon characteristics and strategies associated with each of the six components of a collaborative school culture (Appendix C). All interviews were voluntary and anonymous and were conducted after-school to decrease the amount of possible distractions during the interview process.

Interview Results. The results from the interviews were categorized based upon the six components of a collaborative school culture as detailed within the School Culture Survey (Gruenert & Valentine, 1998). The responses were coded and analyzed based upon individual responses and then summarized to detail commonalities and emerging themes from the exemplar principals participating in the interviews.

Collaborative Leadership. What strategies, practices, and policies have you implemented that have enhanced the collaborative relationships you have with your faculty?

The goal of this question was to examine what practices and policies these principals have enacted that helped to foster relationships with school faculty. Collaborative Leadership component describes the degree to which school leaders establish and maintain collaborative relationships with the school staff. These educational leaders seek the input of the school community, value their ideas, and provide venues for their ideas to be expressed. In addition, collaborative leadership promotes new ideas, new risks and a sense of shared trust that allows for innovation to take place (Byrk & Schneider, 2002).

The responses from each of the participants offered insight into the strategies used to help build collaborative relationships with teachers. Principal (A) stressed the importance of being a consistent presence in the school and more importantly, in the classroom. Specifically, they stated, “I am in the classrooms, I am a presence in the building, they can come to me with any issue.” Additionally, they practice an open-door policy where any teacher can come and discuss a problem or celebrate a success. Furthermore, open lines of communication are fortified through the use of frequent formal and informal meetings. Finally, Principal (A) acknowledged the value of using the open lines of communication to freely discuss how to best serve students.

Principal (B) has been principal at her current school for ten years and stated that they have continually attempted to increase collaboration. One technique utilized is the inclusion of collaboration and collegiality questions and scenarios included in each prospective teacher interview. Principal (B) suggested that this allows them the opportunity to see if future staff will be likely to work collaboratively. This also informs prospective teachers that this school expects teachers to work with others, including administration.

Principal (C) responded by stating that frequent grade-level meetings helped to increase collaboration. By meeting to discuss student data and how to use that information to enhance instruction, the principal maintained that they were meeting the student needs but also improving the opportunities and ability of administration and teachers to work collaboratively.

Teacher Collaboration. What strategies, practices, and policies have enhanced the ability of teachers to collaborate and engage in constructive communication?

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. Ideally, teachers throughout a school will work collectively and collaboratively, including such activities as mutual classroom observations, lesson modeling, grade-level and team planning, and evaluation and assessment of teaching practices (Bambino, 2002).

All three of the respondents emphasized the importance of common planning time and faculty meetings that included small group activities. Principal (A) further stressed the importance of using technology to enhance communication and collegiality between teachers. Through the use of email and web-based learning activities, teachers were able to exchange information more freely and in a more efficient and effective manner. In addition, Principal (A)

implemented a multi-layered set of meetings where the principal would meet with departmental chairs who would then meet with each grade team.

Principal (B) asserted that it was the designation of weekly “professional learning community” opportunities that enhanced the ability of teachers to collaborate and engage in constructive communication. While Principal (C) described, “the grade level/department meetings are very useful for teachers to exchange successful strategies that are working in their classrooms. Articulation meetings are also held with vertical groups to ensure that everyone is working towards a common goal.”

Professional Development. What strategies, policies, or practices have you implemented that allow for increased professional development opportunities for faculty?

Professional Development describes the degree to which teachers value continuous personal development and school-wide improvement. Teachers remain knowledgeable about current and effective practices from workshops, seminars, colleagues, observations, and other professional resources. Continual growth, improvement and learning are the foundation of this component of school culture. Effective educational leaders support teachers with the resources and opportunity to partake in meaningful professional development (Lumpkin, 2008).

For this question there remained a wide variety of practices and strategies used to increase the opportunities for faculty professional development. Principal (A) answered that the creation of a school based “Professional Development Coordinator” has helped to increase faculty awareness of the numerous professional development opportunities. The fact that this coordinator is a fellow teacher is a significant reason why Principal (A) believes that the faculty trusts and continually supports this person.

Principal (C) stated that there are not only numerous opportunities for professional development afforded to the staff but also members of the school faculty have had the opportunity to present skills, strategies, and knowledge they have learned to the whole school. By allowing the faculty to present their pedagogical knowledge and professional growth, Principal (C) found there to be an increase in the willingness to participate in professional development.

Principal (B) attributed the willingness of the staff to engage in professional development to the fact that the professional development matches their needs and that all faculty participates. Continual input from teachers, teacher-led inquiry action projects, and book studies were all centered upon the goals and objectives of the school faculty. Principal (B) indicated that these practices helped to make professional development a welcome component of the school culture. This school leader concluded with a resounding, “I am involved in the professional development as well!”

Unity of Purpose. Describe how you have emphasized the importance of a common mission or vision for your school?

The Unity of Purpose element of school culture describes the degree to which teachers work toward a common mission for the school. This involves an active collaboration amongst parents, teachers, students, support staff, administrators, and the local community toward setting and achieving a common goal. It is these common goals, plans, visions and values that become the focal point of everyone’s efforts (Levin, 2001: Kotter 1996: Schein, 1992).

Amongst the exemplars, the common theme that emerged was the importance of a mission or vision within the school. For Principal (C), that mission is communicated and reinforced through the use of monthly newsletters. For Principal (B), the common goal in their

school is to show respect and to ensure that all children are reading at an appropriate level. The responses from Principal (B) also revealed that each meeting and school activity was conducted with those two goals in mind. Finally, Principal (A) maintained that student achievement was the common goal within the school and that “student achievement is the most important component of the school mission.”

Collegial Support. Describe the ways that you have helped to facilitate opportunities for teachers to work together effectively.

Collegial support details the degree in which teachers work together in an effective and trusting manner. Collegial support may serve as a positive influence upon school culture and student achievement, with the presence of teacher collegiality, mutual respect amongst stakeholders, and a shared responsibility of meeting the needs of students (Blackmore, et al, 1996).

Each of the respondents highlighted the effectiveness of grade-level and cross-grade meetings. These meetings were considered effective means towards sharing strategies and lessons that were deemed exemplary. In addition, the principals suggested that these meeting increased opportunities for thematic instruction and cross-curricular learning opportunities. Principal (B) detailed the use of a coaching model used at his school where pairs of teachers participate in peer observations. Principal (C) also described a peer observation model used at her school and stated, “it is so important to provide adequate coverage to ensure that teachers could watch and learn from each other without impeding the academic growth of the children.”

Learning Partnership. Describe the ways that you have helped to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and (or) students to work together.

Learning Partnership is the extent to which school community stakeholders (parents, teachers, students) collaborate and work collectively for the common good of the schools. The partnership also entails a shared vision amongst school community partners, a belief in shared responsibility, and meaning activities that foster opportunities for connectivity and whole school improvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2001; Fullan, 1999; Schein, 1992).

The answers from the final question emitted the most comprehensive responses as the principals described the various means in which they have strived to forge learning partnerships between the parents, students, and greater school community. Principal (A) explained the importance of involvement from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This involvement has led to the renovation of the teacher lounge as well as the creation of school-wide events such as the spring carnival and an annual garage sale with all proceeds benefiting the PTA. Principal (A) suggests that practices like these have led to 100% teacher participation in the PTA and an understanding that all parents are welcome at school.

Principal (B) responded by detailing two events that he believes to have significantly helped to build relationships between home and school. The first is the “report card night” where students, parents, and teachers all meet to discuss and examine the results of the first grading period. The second event is the annual "Parent University Class" which is described as a seminar based on requested topics such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), reading support or bullying. Sessions are conducted by school staff or community liaisons and are conducted at a day and time that accommodate the unique works schedules of many low-income families.

Principal (C) described the value of communication with the community as a way to forge partnerships. Practices and strategies used to increase communication with stakeholders

include the use of a monthly newsletter and “ed-connect” (mass messaging communication system) highlighting the happenings, successes, and stories at school. Principal (C) indicated, “that through continual communication, relationships with the community were dramatically enhanced.”

Summary of Results

Pearson correlations were utilized to indicate the strength of the linear relationship between and within the independent and dependent variables. The Pearson correlation data (Table 4-2) revealed no significant correlational relationships between the first dependent variable (excessive absences) and the teacher quality characteristics and a significant negative correlational relationship between all school culture factors except for Teacher Collaboration. Pearson correlations were used for the second model (Table 4-7) with suspension percentages as the dependent variable, and showed a positive correlation with all independent variables other than the years of teaching experience (not significant) and teachers without certification (.624, positive correlation). This data further demonstrated numerous significant correlations between teacher quality characteristics and school culture factors.

The performance framework model, using multiple regressions, predicted no significant predictive associations between the independent variables and the excessive student absence dependent variable. The student suspension outcome variable showed significance with three of the independent variables at the .05 level. The model predicted that as the teacher collaboration factor within the school culture survey increased, student suspensions would decrease by 6.709%. In addition, the model predicted that with each one-point incremental increase for the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school, the observed number of suspensions would decrease by .162%. Then, as the percentage of non-certified teachers within a school increased, the model predicted that student suspensions would increase by .222%.

Interviews were conducted to examine the strategies and practices utilized by exemplar school principals to augment the data and better inform practice. The results revealed comprehensive discussions regarding components of a collaborative school culture and educational leadership practices related to data-driven decision-making, developing stakeholder partnerships, teacher guided professional development, and fostering relationships and open communication.

Table 4-1 Descriptive statistics: student attendance

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Excessive Absence %	6.8460	4.49127	50
Collaborative Leadership	3.69	.330	50
Teacher Collaboration	3.5156	.30796	50
Professional Development	3.9894	.21762	50
Unity of Purpose	3.9222	.30715	50
Collegial Support	3.7986	.28463	50
Learning Partnership	3.5514	.29802	50
Advanced Degree %	36.7180	10.11696	50
Years Experience	11.8000	3.16015	50
Out-of-Field %	3.6940	9.58388	50
No Certification %	7.0080	7.88545	50

Table 4-2 Correlations: student attendance (N=50)

		Excessive Absence %	Collaborative Leadership	Teacher Collaborati on	Professional Development	Unity of Purpose	Collegial Support	Learning Partnership	Advanced Degree %	Years Experie nce	Out-of- Field %	No Certification %
Pearson Correlation	Excessive Absence %	1.000	-.315	-.216	-.370	-.444	-.354	-.473	-.038	.025	-.137	.070
	Collaborative Leadership	-.315	1.000	.721	.880	.858	.854	.649	.206	.180	-.133	-.423
	Teacher Collaboration	-.216	.721	1.000	.797	.516	.751	.588	-.065	.123	-.153	-.097
	Professional Development	-.370	.880	.797	1.000	.801	.929	.712	.236	.128	-.113	-.365
	Unity of Purpose	-.444	.858	.516	.801	1.000	.806	.755	.262	.175	-.145	-.481
	Collegial Support	-.354	.854	.751	.929	.806	1.000	.705	.348	.231	-.132	-.418
	Learning Partnerships	-.473	.649	.588	.712	.755	.705	1.000	.185	.002	-.030	-.293
	Advanced Degree %	-.038	.206	-.065	.236	.262	.348	.185	1.000	.538	-.162	-.482
	Years Experience	.025	.180	.123	.128	.175	.231	.002	.538	1.000	-.133	-.142
	Out-of-Field %	-.137	-.133	-.153	-.113	-.145	-.132	-.030	-.162	-.133	1.000	.056
	No Certification %	.070	-.423	-.097	-.365	-.481	-.418	-.293	-.482	-.142	.056	1.000
	Sig 1-tailed	Absent %	#NULL!	.013	.066	.004	.001	.006	.000	.396	.430	.171
Collaborative Leadership		.013	#NULL!	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.076	.105	.179	.001
Teacher Collaboration		.066	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.000	.000	.326	.197	.144	.251
Professional Development		.004	.000	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.000	.049	.188	.218	.005
Unity of Purpose		.001	.000	.000	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.033	.112	.157	.000
Collegial Support		.006	.000	.000	.000	.000	#NULL!	.000	.007	.053	.180	.001
Learning Partnerships		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	#NULL!	.100	.494	.419	.019
Advanced Degree %		.396	.076	.326	.049	.033	.007	.100	#NULL!	.000	.130	.000
Years Experience		.430	.105	.197	.188	.112	.053	.494	.000	#NULL!	.178	.162
Out-of-Field %		.171	.179	.144	.218	.157	.180	.419	.130	.178	#NULL!	.350
No Certification %		.315	.001	.251	.005	.000	.001	.019	.000	.162	.350	#NULL!

Table 4-3 Regression coefficients: student attendance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	47.306	14.753		3.207	.003
	Collaborative Leadership	3.812	5.101	.280	.747	.459
	Teacher Collaboration	2.162	5.169	.148	.418	.678
	Professional Development	-4.757	9.483	-.230	-.502	.619
	Unity of Purpose	-6.780	5.979	-.464	-1.134	.264
	Collegial Support	-.661	6.664	-.042	-.099	.921
	Learning Partnership	-3.906	3.833	-.259	-1.019	.315
	Advanced Degree %	.017	.106	.038	.159	.875
	Years Experience	.015	.268	.011	.058	.954
	Out-of-Field Percentage	-.078	.067	-.167	-1.160	.253
	Teachers without Certification %	-.096	.099	-.168	-.966	.340

*Dependent Variable: Absences 21+ days

Table 4-4 Model summary: student attendance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.564	.319	.144	4.15569

a. Predictors: (Constant), Teachers without Certification %, Out-of-Field Percentage, Teacher Collaboration, Years Experience, Learning Partnership, Advanced Degree %, Unity of Purpose, Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Professional Development

b. Dependent Variable: excessive absence %

Table 4-5 Analysis of variance: student attendance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	314.884	10	31.488	1.823	.089 ^a
	Residual	673.520	39	17.270		
	Total	988.404	49			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Teachers without Certification %, Out-of-Field Percentage, Teacher Collaboration, Years Experience, Learning Partnership, Advanced Degree %, Unity of Purpose, Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Professional Development

b. Dependent Variable: excessive absence %

Figure 4-1 Regression: student attendance

Histogram

Dependent Variable: absentpercent

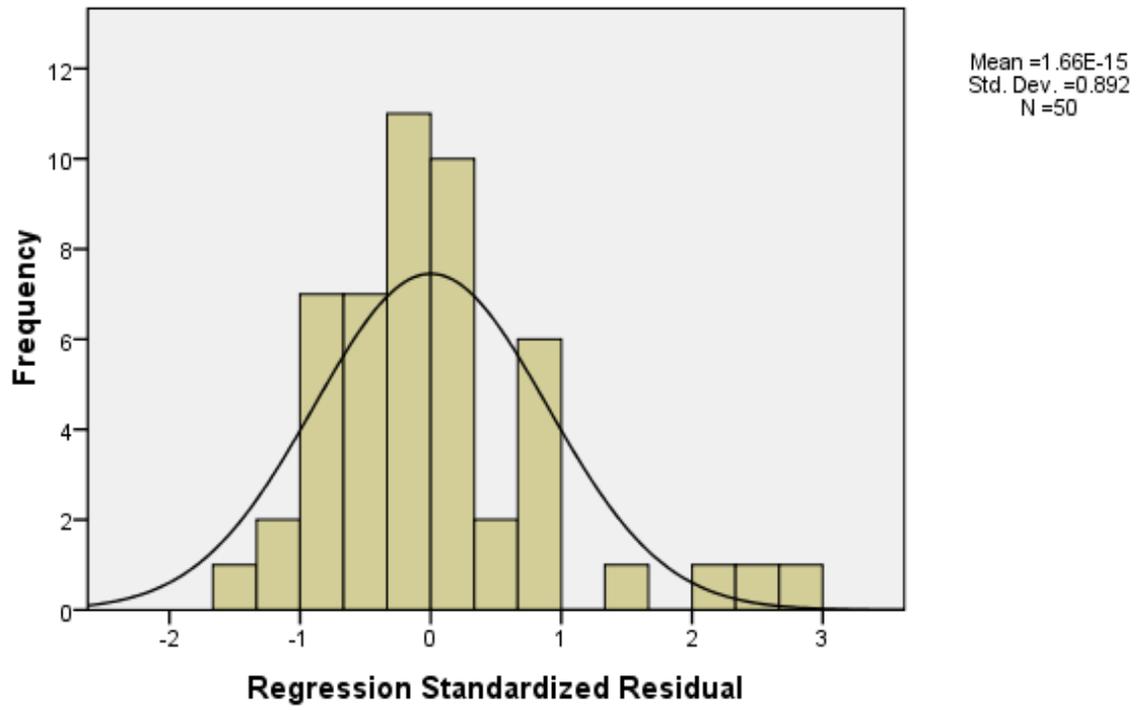


Table 4-6 Descriptive statistics: student suspensions

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Suspension %	5.0720	3.69291	50
Collaborative Leadership	3.69	.330	50
Teacher Collaboration	3.5156	.30796	50
Professional Development	3.9894	.21762	50
Unity of Purpose	3.9222	.30715	50
Collegial Support	3.7986	.28463	50
Learning Partnership	3.5514	.29802	50
Advanced Degree %	36.7180	10.11696	50
Years Experience	11.8000	3.16015	50
Out-of-Field Percentage	3.6940	9.58388	50
Teachers without Certification %	7.0080	7.88545	50

Table 4-7 Correlations: student suspensions

		Suspension %	Collaborative Leadership	Teacher Collaboration	Professional Development	Unity of Purpose	Collegial Support	Learning Partnership	Advanced Degree %	Years Experience	Out-of-Field %	Teachers without Certification %	
Pearson Correlation	Suspension %	1.000	-.470	-.284	-.403	-.428	-.434	-.320	-.368	-.197	-.265	.624	
	Collaborative Leadership	-.470	1.000	.721	.880	.858	.854	.649	.206	.180	-.133	-.423	
	Teacher Collaboration	-.284	.721	1.000	.797	.516	.751	.588	-.065	.123	-.153	-.097	
	Professional Development	-.403	.880	.797	1.000	.801	.929	.712	.236	.128	-.113	-.365	
	Unity of Purpose	-.428	.858	.516	.801	1.000	.806	.755	.262	.175	-.145	-.481	
	Collegial Support	-.434	.854	.751	.929	.806	1.000	.705	.348	.231	-.132	-.418	
	Learning Partnership	-.320	.649	.588	.712	.755	.705	1.000	.185	.002	-.030	-.293	
	Advanced Degree %	-.368	.206	-.065	.236	.262	.348	.185	1.000	.538	-.162	-.482	
	Years Experience	-.197	.180	.123	.128	.175	.231	.002	.538	1.000	-.133	-.142	
	Out-of-Field Percentage	-.265	-.133	-.153	-.113	-.145	-.132	-.030	-.162	-.133	1.000	.056	
	Teachers without Certification %	.624	-.423	-.097	-.365	-.481	-.418	-.293	-.482	-.142	.056	1.000	
	Sig. (1-tailed)	Suspension %	#NULL!	.000	.023	.002	.001	.001	.012	.004	.086	.032	.000
		Collaborative Leadership	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.076	.105	.179	.001
Teacher Collaboration		.023	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.000	.000	.326	.197	.144	.251	
Professional Development		.002	.000	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.000	.049	.188	.218	.005	
Unity of Purpose		.001	.000	.000	.000	#NULL!	.000	.000	.033	.112	.157	.000	
Collegial Support		.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	#NULL!	.000	.007	.053	.180	.001	
Learning Partnership		.012	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	#NULL!	.100	.494	.419	.019	
Advanced Degree %		.004	.076	.326	.049	.033	.007	.100	#NULL!	.000	.130	.000	
Years Experience		.086	.105	.197	.188	.112	.053	.494	.000	#NULL!	.178	.162	
Out-of-Field Percentage		.032	.179	.144	.218	.157	.180	.419	.130	.178	#NULL!	.350	
Teachers without Certification %		.000	.001	.251	.005	.000	.001	.019	.000	.162	.350	#NULL!	

Table 4-8 Coefficients: student suspensions

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	12.686	9.081		1.397	.170
	Collaborative Leadership	-2.252	3.140	-.201	-.717	.477
	Teacher Collaboration	-6.709	3.182	-.560	-2.108	.041
	Professional Development	5.958	5.838	.351	1.021	.314
	Unity of Purpose	-3.210	3.681	-.267	-.872	.388
	Collegial Support	2.499	4.102	.193	.609	.546
	Learning Partnerships	1.801	2.360	.145	.763	.450
	Advanced Degree %	-.125	.066	-.343	-1.910	.063
	Years Experience	.072	.165	.062	.437	.665
	Out-of-Field Percentage	-.162	.041	-.421	-3.911	.000
	Teachers without Certification %	.222	.061	.474	3.636	.001

Dependent Variable (constant): Out-of-School Suspension

Table 4-9 Model summary: student suspensions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.786 ^a	.618	.520	2.55815

a. Predictors: (Constant), Teachers without Certification %, Out-of-Field Percentage, Teacher Collaboration, Years Experience, Learning Partnerships, Advanced Degree %, Unity of Purpose, Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Professional Development

b. Dependent Variable: Suspension %

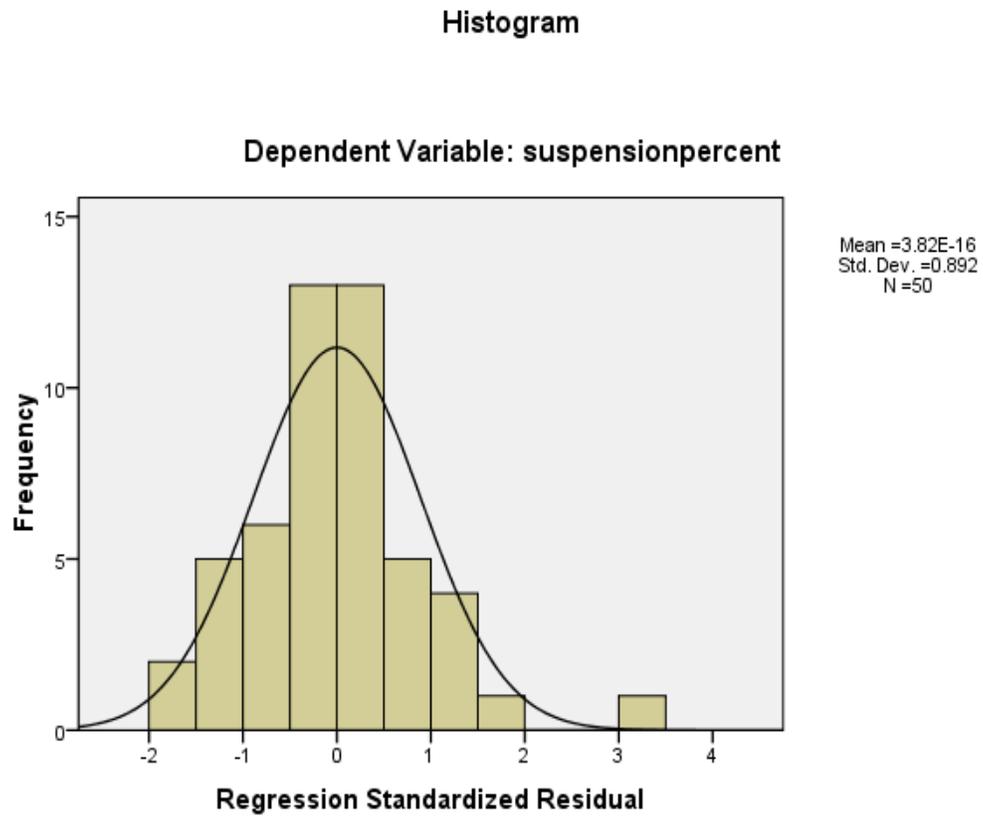
Table 4-10 Analysis of variance: student suspensions

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	413.020	10	41.302	6.311	.000 ^a
	Residual	255.221	39	6.544		
	Total	668.241	49			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Teachers without Certification %, Out-of-Field Percentage, Teacher Collaboration, Years Experience, Learning Partnership, Advanced Degree %, Unity of Purpose, Collaborative Leadership, Collegial Support, Professional Development

b. Dependent Variable: Suspension %

Figure 4-2 Regression: student suspensions



CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

As a mixed method study, the research utilized a statistical survey and statistical modeling perspective. The research methods utilized to collect data included the use of school culture surveys and interviews with educational leaders. Data collected included teacher and student demographic data, student outcome data, school culture survey results, and the practices of school leaders. The analysis of the data was conducted to determine the correlational and predictive associations between the dependent (student suspensions & excessive absences) and independent variables (teacher quality characteristics & school culture factors) along with an examination of the strategies used by principals in highly collaborative schools. The purpose of the study was to determine if teacher quality characteristics, educational leadership practices and school culture influence student attendance and supposition rates.

Review of the Methodology

The research methods utilized to collect data included the use of surveys and interviews with exemplary educational leaders. Data were obtained for the 2008-2009 school year from 50 elementary schools in Florida. Sample schools were selected based upon their participation in a statewide school improvement program directed by the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida. The research activities covered a two-month data collection period, from October 1, 2008 until December 1, 2008. Using the school as the unit of analysis, data were obtained from each of the fifty schools participating in these school reform initiatives. In addition, comprehensive interviews were conducted with school principals whose schools achieved the highest scores on the school culture surveys. These interviews served to inform

practice and augment the performance framework data as to the practices and strategies that support a collaborative school culture

The Research Participants

Demographic data provides a context for the schools participating in the study (Bernhardt, 1994). Teacher demographics examined years experience, teacher advanced degrees, teacher certification and teaching in the field in which they are trained. The participants were represented by fifty elementary schools in the four districts of Alachua, Collier, Duval, and Miami-Dade. The school demographic data were obtained from the Florida Department of Education and represented student data from the 2007-2008 school year. The data trends, although not detailing the current school year, give a context to the participant schools in terms of the demographics and characteristics of the teaching faculty.

The school data analysis revealed the following data in relation to the sample schools and their faculty. As indicated in the first chapter, the sample population was described as schools from districts with a student population typically from low socio-economic backgrounds. Within the sample, the student population demographic data revealed a significantly higher percentage of students from high-poverty backgrounds (determined by the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch) than averages at the state and national level (Figure 3-1).

To further provide context for the research, an examination of the current suspension and excessive absence rates data is provided to compare the sample population with the state of Florida averages. The sample population experienced fewer excessive absences and out-of-school suspensions in relation to the state averages (Figure 3-3). The teacher demographics were also examined to compare the sample schools with the state averages. The teacher demographic data revealed that the sample population possessed higher percentages of teachers with advanced degrees, those teaching within field, and those with certification (Figure 3-2).

Summary of the Results

Pearson correlations were utilized to indicate the strength of the linear relationship between and within the independent and dependent variables. The Pearson correlation data (Table 4-2) revealed no significant correlational relationships between the first dependent variable (excessive absences) and the teacher quality characteristics and a significant negative correlational relationship between all school culture factors except for Teacher Collaboration. Pearson correlations were used for the second model (Table 4-7) with suspension percentages as the dependent variable, showed a positive correlation with all independent variables other than the years of teaching experience (not significant) and teachers without certification (.624, positive correlation). This data further demonstrated numerous significant correlations between teacher quality characteristics and school culture factors.

Furthermore, the performance framework model, using multiple regressions, predicted no significant predictive associations between the independent variables and the excessive student absence dependent variable. The student suspension outcome variable showed significance with three of the independent variables at the .05 level. The model predicted that as the teacher collaboration factor within the school culture survey increased, student suspensions would decrease by 6.709%. In addition, the model predicted that with each one-point incremental increase for the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school, the observed number of suspensions would decrease by .162%. Then, as the percentage of non-certified teachers within a school increased by each percentage point, the model predicted that student suspensions would increase by .222%.

Interviews were conducted to examine the strategies and practices utilized by exemplar school principals to augment the data and better inform practice. The results revealed comprehensive discussions regarding components of a collaborative school culture and

educational leadership practices related to data-driven decision-making, developing stakeholder partnerships, teacher guided professional development, and fostering relationships and open communication.

Discussion of the Results

Interpretation of the Findings

The discussion of the results is based upon each of the research questions. The interpretations are as follows:

Performance framework data

Is there a relationship between the characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with certification & advanced degrees and the average years of experience for teachers within a school) and student attendance and suspension rates?

Pearson correlations were utilized to determine the associations between the inputs (teacher quality characteristics) and the outputs (student attendance and suspension rates). The performance framework model revealed no significant correlational relationships between the characteristics of teacher quality and the student attendance variable. Pearson correlations using suspension percentages as the dependent variable showed a significant positive correlation with teachers without certification rates (.624) and a significant negative correlation with the percentage of out-of-field teachers (-.265).

Multiple regression was used to determine the predictive associations between the inputs (teacher quality characteristics) and the outputs (student attendance and suspension rates). The data revealed no significant predictive associations between the student attendance (excessive absence) dependent variable and the independent variables (Table 4-3). The student suspension dependent variable showed significance with two of the input independent variables at the .01

level. The factors include the out-of-field teaching percentage (.000) and teachers without certification percentages (.001). The level of significance demonstrated the strength of the predictive association between these two independent variables with the suspension percentages within the sample population schools. The model predicted that with each one-point incremental increase for the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school, the observed number of suspensions would decrease by .162%. Then, as the percentage of non-certified teachers within a school increased by one percentage point, the model predicted that student suspensions would increase by .222%.

The first surprising detail emerging from the data was the fact that there were no predictive or correlational relationships between teacher quality characteristics and the excessive student absence variable. This calls into question the value of using that particular variable in determining student outcomes and ultimately, student achievement. Excessive absences, especially at the elementary level, may not be the most valuable measure of student achievement or student outcomes. Student attendance at this level may be influenced more by parental influence rather than the practices and teacher qualities being exhibited at school. Student attendance may serve as a more valuable dependent variable when examining secondary schools.

Furthermore, the data found that the years of teaching experience failed to show correlational or predictive significance for both dependent variables. This is important as it informs the research on the value of teacher merit rather than teacher longevity as a predictor of teacher quality. Teacher contracts and hiring practices have long been bound by years experience, with teachers traditionally being paid, retained, and evaluated based upon this factor. Yet, if this factor has no significant relationship between student attendance and student suspension rates, can we begin to incorporate other methods to influence our teacher salary and

retention methods? If variables such as certification and possessing advanced degrees influence student outcomes, then these factors should be taken into account when districts and school leaders recruit, hire, retain, and compensate teachers.

The data also reinforces the contradictions that often emerge when analyzing the characteristics of teacher quality whereas an increase in the percentage of out-of-field teachers is associated with decreases suspensions while an increase in non-certified teachers is associated with an increase in suspensions. The correlations with suspensions as the dependent variable showed a positive correlation between non-certified teachers and a negative correlation with out-of-field teachers. The data may have also been influenced by the fact that the sample population had a much lower percentage of non-certified and out-of-field staff. The contradictions in the study may support the notion that the elements of quality teaching that most directly impact student achievement may often be those most challenging to measure (Walsh & Hale, 2004).

Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and characteristics of teacher quality (the percentage of classes taught by out-of-field teachers, the percentage of teachers with certification & advanced degrees, and the average years of experience for teachers within a school)?

Pearson correlations demonstrated significant (1 tailed- significant at .05 or below) relationships amongst the teacher quality characteristics and the school culture factors including: A positive correlation between Advanced Degrees and Professional Development (.236), a positive correlation between Advanced Degrees and the Unity of Purpose factor (.262), a positive correlation between Advanced Degrees and the Collegial Support factor(.348), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Collaborative Leadership factor (-.423), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and

the Professional Development factor (-.365), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Unity of Purpose Factor (-.481), a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Collegial Support factor (-.418), and a negative correlation between teachers without certification rates and the Learning Partnership factor (-.293).

Next, multiple regressions were used to determine the predictive associations between the processes (school culture factors) and the inputs (teacher quality characteristics). The data revealed no significant predictive associations between the factors of school culture and the characteristics of teacher quality at the .05 level (Tables 4-3 & 4-8).

The fact that there were no predictive associations between the school culture factors and the teacher quality characteristics may signify the importance of the school principal and the policies and procedures taking place within the school. For example, regardless of the background, educational attainment, or certification status of teachers, these factors may have limited influence upon the culture of the school. This supports the idea of collaboration between and among teachers, regardless of the “inputs” they bring with them. This lends hope to the notion that it matters more what is happening in the school rather than what certifications, degrees, or even experience teachers possess.

There were numerous significant correlations between school culture factors and teacher quality characteristics. Teachers with advanced degrees showed positive correlational relationships with Collegial Support, Unity of Purpose, and Professional Development. This may signify a teacher force with an increased likelihood of an understanding of the value of professional growth and sharing ideas and learning opportunities with colleagues. This data suggests the positive influence that may arise when teachers have or are in the process of

pursuing advanced degrees. This may also augment the research supporting job-embedded advanced degrees as part of the learning opportunities afforded to teachers within the school

In contrast there was a negative correlation between the percentage of teachers without certification and all but one of the school culture factors (teacher collaboration). Teachers without certifications are often mid-career teachers, moving from other types of employment without formal training and often with a varying set of skills and expectations. The factors that make up a collaborative school culture such as collaborative leadership, collegial support, and embracing community partnerships may not be the norm in many fields such as business, finance, law and the military. District and school leaders should work to engage non-certified teachers to embrace and harness the skills that they do bring to the school communities. Yet, the non-certified teachers should be exposed to training and learning opportunities allowing them to understand the importance and put into practice working with a common goal, pursuing professional growth, having a shared vision, and calling upon colleagues and leaders for support and shared decision-making.

Is there a relationship between school culture factors, as measured by the School Culture Survey, and student attendance and suspension rates?

Pearson h analysis revealed numerous significant (1 tailed- significant at .05 or below) correlations between the school culture factors and the dependent variables including: a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Collaborative Leadership factor (-.315), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Professional Development factor (-.370), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Unity of Purpose factor (-.444), a negative correlation between student attendance percentage and the Collegial Support factor (-.354), a negative correlation between student attendance

percentage and the Learning Partnership factor (-.473). The correlations between the Teacher Collaboration independent variable and the student attendance dependent variable were not significant. The negative correlations between 5 of the 6 culture factors all point to a relationship in which as the culture variables improve, excessive absence declines.

The data demonstrates the importance of school culture factors and their relationship to student outcomes. Peterson (2002) suggests that culture is built within a school over time as teachers, school leaders, parents and students work together and it is the school culture that often influences the staff development and professional growth that takes place within a school. Student outcomes are influenced when leaders work collaboratively, when teachers participate in professional growth and when the school community unites in a common vision. A school faculty that works collectively and collaboratively will be able to share knowledge, skills, and practices needed to reduce suspensions. Then, a collaborative school will be able to work with families and community members to communicate and unify to ensure students are attending, and more importantly, learning.

Next multiple regressions were used to determine the predictive associations between the processes (school culture factors) and the outputs (student attendance and suspension rates). Unlike the correlations, the student suspension dependent variable showed significance with the teacher collaboration variable ($p = .041$) (Table 4-8). The model predicted that as the teacher collaboration factor within the school culture survey increased by one percentage point, student suspensions would decrease by 6.709%.

This piece of data is extremely important as it illustrates the significance of teacher collaboration in relation to student outcomes. When teachers work collectively and share in the collective education of children, they are better equipped to meet the needs of their students. For

example, collaborating teachers across grade levels might share behavior management techniques, family history about a child, or even allow a teacher to send a misbehaving child to another room to diffuse a situation. Teacher collaboration may also enrich teacher-learning opportunities with peer mentoring and observation as well as thematic based integrated units between classroom and special subject teachers. These strategies may seem insignificant at the school level, but when examined across the sample population, the impact on practice in the state of Florida would be significant. A 6.709% decrease in the suspension rates would result in nearly 13,000 less students being suspended annually within the sample of 50 schools. (Florida School Indicators Report, 2008).

Exemplar interviews

What are the practices of educational leaders that contribute to a collaborative school culture? The interviews with the exemplar school leaders were conducted to discover the practices, policies and strategies utilized by principals that served to establish a collaborative culture within their schools. Numerous commonalities and themes emerged from the transcribed responses. The results from this valuable data will help to inform practice and serve as a guide to schools and school leaders searching for methods to enhance collaborative school culture.

The first theme that emerged was the use of collaborative leadership techniques amongst a variety of stakeholders within the school community. Principals described various ways that they valued teacher-led decision-making and engaged teachers in the creation of professional development activities to best fit their needs. Rather than professional development that is often generic in nature or mandated by the district, these leaders called upon the school community to shape the professional training that would partake in. This demonstrates to those stakeholders that their opinion is valued and that they are a partner in the school community.

In addition, adequate time and coverage was afforded teachers to pursue professional growth and administrators even encouraged the faculty to share what they had learned with their colleagues. These practices can encourage teachers to pursue additional training and growth. Often teachers are hindered by the lack of support or the mere fact that their class cannot be covered when they are away at a conference or observing other teachers. Teachers can feel a distinct sense of pride upon returning to their classroom or to faculty meetings and demonstrating these new skills and strategies with students in their class or colleagues within the faculty. In times of budget cut backs, having teachers themselves conduct professional development workshops may serve as a cost cutting measure that also boosts morale of the faculty and encourages further collaboration.

Collaboration with school community stakeholders was also apparent in the inclusion of parents in much of the decision-making and even the learning taking place at each school. All schools emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for parents to be actively engaged in the education of their children. Examples in the research included Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) participation in school functions, training sessions for parents, and monthly newsletters to inform families about upcoming events and news from the school. When parents are encouraged to participate, they are more likely to be involved and feel vested in the education of their children. The principles interviewed exemplified how to embrace the school community as a resource to augment the teaching and learning taking place within the school.

The second theme established in the interviews was the use of data to inform and influence decision-making. Common practices included teacher inquiry based upon student data and meeting (grade-level, departmental, and whole schools) to discuss strategies for targeting specific students or widespread areas of concern. The interviews revealed that data is not only

being collected and shared throughout the three schools, but this information is being communicated in a manner that is intended to result in improvements in instruction and student achievement. This strategy is paramount, as data should be used as a tool to inform instruction and not just to evaluate it. Teachers, parents, and even students should have ample opportunities to examine and then use data to shape and guide

The final theme was the integration of a common mission or vision throughout the activities and practices taking place within the schools. Each school leader emphasized the importance of having a common goal and how that goal should be communicated whenever possible. Examples included the goal of maintaining mutual respect for each other and the students to the understanding that all school policies should be enacted with the sole purpose of improving student achievement. The use of a common mission or vision is paramount to helping to shape the guiding principles and practices with a common understanding. This practice can lead to a uniform understanding of why policies are enacted, how teachers, and the best way that students can learn. This also ensures that community stakeholders all share an understanding and all and if people fail to share that common vision, then this school setting may not be the best fit.

One of the most glaring omissions from the responses was the absence of standardized testing, No Child Left Behind (N.C.L.B.), or high-stakes accountability throughout the school culture discussion. Student achievement was a common theme, yet; there was no mention of the relationship between student achievement and performance on national or state level standardized exams. The responses were focused more upon student achievement in relation to performance –based measures such as ensuring that all students were reading at grade level.

Another omission was lack of any mention to the widespread economic and budgetary issues plaguing the state of Florida. Reduction in revenues throughout the state have prompted

many districts to reduce the number of teachers, eliminate support structures, and implement varying cost cutting measures. Yet, the school principals interviewed did not include the current conditions as reasons why their success in creating a collaborative school culture may cease. There was no mention whatsoever that any of the policies and procedures implemented would be eliminated as a cost cutting measure. This may be attributed to the fact that many of the strategies were not supported by funds but by actions and practices enacted by the school community.

Finally, despite revealing many helpful strategies and answering all of the questions, the interviews themselves failed to fully meet the intended goals of the study. The school principals often seemed to conjure up answers that seemed generic and without the comprehensive nature that was intended. For example, when asked about enabling teacher collaboration within a school, answers such as providing common planning time were offered as strategies. Yet, these are commonplace activities in almost all schools. There is no doubt that if it is merely the use of common planning time that they believe increases collaboration, then almost all of our schools would have achieved similar scores upon the culture survey.

Relationship of the current study to previous research.

Sample Population

Examination of the sample population revealed numerous discussion provoking details. For example, a recent study by Reardon (2008) examining the relationship between school-level socio-economic status and school-level annual daily attendance, demonstrated that the highest poverty schools exhibited the highest excessive absence rates. Yet, when analyzing the sample population in comparison to the state averages, the data contradicted the previous research.

Specifically, the percentage of high poverty students, determined by free and reduced lunch enrollment, within the sample school population was 84% (Figure 3-1). This was significantly more than the rates found at the state (51%) and national (39%) levels. However, analysis of the student outcome data (suspensions, excessive absences), contradicts the research stating that higher poverty schools would demonstrate higher excessive absence rates. The outcome data (Figure 3-2) reveals that the sample population's excessive absence (6.8%) and student suspension (5.1%) rates were lower than the state averages of 9.4% and 6.8% respectively.

The analysis of the sample population in regards to teacher demographic data contradicts findings from previous research. For example, according to Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff (2002), high poverty, urban districts are more likely to have teachers who are less qualified including those without advanced degrees and lacking teacher certification or those teaching out of their field. Instead, the sample population, while having a higher percentage of high poverty students (84%) than the state (51%) and national (39%) averages, failed to demonstrate a relationship between higher poverty schools having less qualified teachers (Figure 3-3). Specifically, the sample population had a lower percentage of teachers without certification (7% compared to 8.6%) and a lower percentage of educators teaching out-of-field (3.7% compared to 8.2%). The sample also employed a higher percentage of teachers with advanced degrees (36.7%) than the state averages.(29.7%)

Performance framework data

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. Ideally, teachers throughout a school will work collectively and collaboratively, enhancing

teaching and learning through the use of such activities as mutual classroom observations, lesson modeling, grade-level and team planning, and evaluation and assessment of teaching practices (Bambino, 2002). This research supports the importance of teacher collaboration, for, when the teacher collaboration factor increased one point within the school culture survey, the model predicted that student suspensions decreased by 6.709 %.

The performance framework data also determined that as the percent of non-certified teachers in a school increased one percentage point, suspensions were observed to increase by .222%. Although the data only reveals a small increase, this predictive association is supported by Linda Darling-Hammond (2000), who stated that student achievement increased and dropout rates decreased when teachers were certified. In fact, Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) found that teacher certification had a strong influence upon student achievement in high school mathematics and science, above and beyond the effects of teachers' subject matter degrees. The performance framework model further supports the importance of teacher certification, as it may contribute to increased student achievement through the decrease in suspensions (Ali & Dufresne, 2008, Railsback, 2004).

The data also revealed that as the percentage of out-of-field teachers in a school increased one percentage point, the suspension rates were observed to decrease by .16%. This increase may be small but it does contradict the relevant research which suggests that those who have a major in the subjects they teach ("teaching in field") elicit increased student outcomes from their students than out-of-field teachers, controlling for student's previous academic achievement and socioeconomic status (EducationWeek, 2004; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Supporting the performance framework data is the research that suggests that out-of-field teachers may result in equal or even higher student test scores than their in-field teaching counterparts (Walsh, 2007;

Wenglinsky, 2002). One possible explanation for this surprising result is the low percentage of out-of-field teachers within the sample population. The teacher demographic data (Figure 3-3) shows that the sample population had 3.7% of educators within their schools teaching out-of-field while the state percentage was 8.20%. The state average is more than two-times the sample percentage and this may account for the significant negative predictive association between out-of-field teacher percentages and student suspension rates.

Exemplar interviews

Fullan suggests that effective school leaders participate in activities that encourage teacher learning (2001). The exemplar interviews support this notion with the importance of professional development stressed by each of the participants. Strategies and practices used by these principals to encourage teacher learning include the use of meetings to discuss data and how to use that data to inform instruction. In addition, frequent and comprehensive formal professional development opportunities including teacher inquiry projects, hosting district level workshops and trainings, and establishing weekly professional learning community activities were offered as ways to create increased professional development opportunities for faculty. Further examples include the participation of administration in the teacher learning activities, reinforcing the research stating that effective educational leaders influence others and bring about positive change by exemplifying the values and behaviors they want others in the school community to adopt (Elmore, 2000; Kotter, 1996).

Cosner and Peterson (2003) affirm that promoting teacher professional development was the most influential educational leadership behavior. Further research suggests effective educational leadership encompasses the ability to provide support for educational efforts and create learning environments that promote professional growth (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2002). School communities that promote professional growth were evident throughout the

interviews. Common planning and meeting times were defined by each of the participants as instrumental in providing opportunities for teacher learning and professional growth. To facilitate such meetings, one principal suggested the use of weekly-designated blocks of uninterrupted time. Another participant stressed the importance of providing adequate classroom coverage so that teachers could pursue professional development endeavors. Departmental and Cross-level grade team meetings is an approach used by two of the exemplar principals to increase collaboration between teachers and as a means to collectively share techniques for improving teaching and learning. One principal specifically lauded the impact of cross-grade level team meetings as they were considered to enhance the ability of different grade teams to work collectively for children outside of their classroom or grade.

Effective educational leaders are those who establish a partnership with teachers with the primary goal of the improvement of teaching and learning (Hoy, 2009). Examples of collaborative partnerships between principals and faculty were also demonstrated in the exemplar interviews. Principal (A) described the importance of having an “open-door” policy where discussion can take place throughout the day and thus were a means of establishing open lines of communication. Principal (B) detailed how professional development opportunities were designed and planned by the teachers themselves and based upon their expressed needs and desires. Two principals also shared a strategy of using their own teachers to conduct teacher training and school-based professional development described by principals as a means to demonstrate a willingness to work collaboratively with teachers. Additionally, Principal (A) described how the partnership with the teachers and administration had been formalized with the creation of a teacher-led Professional Development Coordinator position that works with

teachers and administrators to design and implement all school-based professional development activities.

Along with effective educational leadership, recent trends have begun to emerge that emphasize teacher-centered and alternative supervision and evaluation methods. Involving fellow in various leadership roles, including teacher evaluation, helps to create and maintain support for their role as leaders (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). For example, one alternative evaluation method is the use of peer review in which teachers evaluate the teaching strategies of other teachers (Lieberman, 1998). Strategies emerging from the interviews supported this practice as a means to build upon and increase collaboration between teachers. Principal (B) has implemented a peer-coaching model, which allows for teachers to participate in peer observations and later meet and discuss what they saw and work together to develop ways to improve instruction. Principal (C) also commented on their use of this type of model but further stressed that ensuring proper classroom coverage by administration was an essential component.

Research detailing a common mission or vision also shared commonalities with the exemplar interviews. Teske and Schneider (1999) state that an effective principal defines the culture within the school and establishes high standards and integrates those standards into the mission of the school. All three of the principals interviewed described in detail the strategies used in establishing a common goal, mission, or vision. For Principal (A), the common goal was student achievement and this was emphasized throughout all school-based policies and described within the school mission and vision, which are posted within each and every classroom. Principal (B) explained that the common goal within the school was a shared understanding of mutual respect and that each and every teacher should be working to ensure that all students are

reading on grade level. Principal (C) attributed the prevalence of a collective vision to the use of constant reinforcement and communication of the common goals.

Recommendations for Educators

Sample Population

One of the most striking findings from the research was found in the initial demographic analysis of the sample population. Despite have a significantly higher percentage of students from a high poverty background; the sample schools witnessed lower suspension and excessive absence rates. Furthermore, the sample schools also maintained higher percentages of teachers with advanced degrees, certification, and teaching within-field, described by Darling-Hammond (2000) as contributing factors to quality teaching and student success. This data serves as an example to teachers, principals, and policy makers that despite the obstacles facing schools servicing high poverty students, keeping children in school and employing highly qualified educators is an attainable goal which will lead to increased student achievement.

The sample population also serves to enhance the significance of the findings. The schools participating in the research represent elementary schools in urban and rural districts throughout the state of Florida with high rates of minority students, teacher turnover, significant free and reduced lunch populations, and historically low student achievement scores. This research seems likely to enrich the knowledge base available to policy makers, administrators, and district personnel serving teachers and students in districts throughout the nation that mirror the same attributes of the sample population.

Performance framework data

The methods chosen for this study provide insight into the impact school culture and the characteristics of effective teaching may have upon student outcomes. Rather than focus directly on standardized test scores, this study focuses on two distinct variables: attendance rates and out-

of-school suspensions. These two factors have been found to influence student achievement as well as student efficacy and graduation rates (Sheldon, 2003).

The factors influencing student suspension were paramount to the significance of the research to inform practice. The model predicted that as the level of teacher collaboration increases by one point in the School Culture Survey, the percentage of student suspensions would decrease by 6.709%. When teachers work collectively, they are better equipped to meet the needs of their students. Suspensions often occur as a last resort, when teachers cannot handle a situation with a student or when an incident merits removal from the school setting. Yet, when teachers collaborate and work collectively for the sake of all children, not just their own classroom, more information becomes available to meet the needs of children. For example, collaborating teachers across grade levels might share behavior management techniques, family history about a child, or even allow a teacher to send a misbehaving child to another room to defuse a situation. The impact on practice in the state of Florida would be significant. A 6.709% decrease would result in nearly 13,000 less students being suspended annually throughout the state (Florida School Indicators report, 2008).

The percentages of out-of field and certified teachers also maintained a predictive association with suspension rates. The model showed that both were highly significant in relation to the dependent variable. The model resulted in contrasting predictive relationships, whereas increased out-of-field meant decreased suspensions while increased uncertified teachers may lead to increased suspensions. These findings may have implications for institutions of higher education and school districts in relation to the importance of these characteristics, so often used in preparation, placement, and hiring practices (Liston, et al., 2008). The data suggest that these factors are significant, yet the predictive influence may also be skewed due to the small sample

size and the interaction of other variables that so often make examining the factors that determine teacher quality difficult to measure (Walsh, 2007).

Although they cannot determine a predictive association, the correlational analysis revealed numerous conclusions that will help to inform practice. For example, the performance framework model revealed significant correlational relationships (Table 4-2) between the percentage of teachers within a school possessing advanced degrees (-.038) and average years teaching experience (.025) and the dependent variable (excessive absences). These data suggest a more educated and experienced staff may influence student attendance rates. This may also support policies and practices that lead to increased opportunities for job embedded advanced degrees. The implications for hiring practices would be significant as principals and districts may alter their hiring practices as the model showed an inverse correlation between excessive absence and advanced degrees while teaching experience had a positive correlation with excessive absences.

Another important component of the correlational analysis is the influence of the learning partnership factor within the school culture survey. The performance framework model revealed a significant positive correlational relationship ($p = .002$) between the average experience of teachers within a school and the learning partnership factor of the School Culture Survey. This data further demonstrated a significant inverse correlational relationship ($p = -.030$) between the percentage of out-of-field teachers within a school and the learning partnership factor of the School Culture Survey (Tables 4-2 & 4-7). In a school setting it is often the more experienced teachers that are able to navigate the complexities of establishing learning partnerships with the school community. Speaking with community leaders, getting parents involved, and engaging students are all elements of establishing a learning partnership and those relationships and skills

take time to develop. Conversely, out-of-field teachers may feel initiated by an unfamiliar teaching role or setting and thus may fail to establish the relationships needed in a learning partnership. Many schools have begun to implement practices that foster collaboration between experienced and novice/out-of-field teachers including mentoring partnerships, peer observations, cross-grade teams, and professional learning communities.

This study emphasizes the importance of collaboration. Whether it be experienced teachers mentoring their out-of-field peers or those with advanced degrees sharing new techniques to a school staff, the practice of collaboration is essential in addressing each factor related to the student outcomes. Out-of-field teachers sharing how they address reducing suspensions and experienced teachers showing how they involve stakeholders are just the beginning. It is these outcomes that have a direct impact on student success and sharing the skills and attributes of each teacher is essential to improving attendance and suspension rates and ultimately, student achievement.

Exemplar interviews

The interviews conducted with the three-exemplar school principals mirrored much of what the relevant literature detailed in terms of the importance of effective school leadership. Deal and Peterson (1998) attest that principals and administrators need to lead educational improvement, foster effective change efforts, lead the implementation of new standards, and are central to shaping strong, professional school cultures. The strategies and practices described by the school leaders in this study address many of these same skills, essential to the success of the teaching and learning taking place in schools.

The first recommendation is the establishment of a common mission and vision for the school. Beginning with interviews of potential teachers, Principal (B) included questions and scenarios that would make it clear that stakeholders at this school worked together as a group for

the common good of the children. In addition, the common goal should be based upon principles of student success and achievement, whereas a teacher's belief that students can achieve is one of the most predictive measures of a student's success (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Each of the participant schools held a common goal that was not only grounded in student achievement but also measurable, such as all students reading at grade level. This is important so that the common goal becomes something that is truly attainable rather than a mere lofty aspiration.

When establishing a common goal, it is imperative to communicate this vision to stakeholders. The interviews revealed principals posting goals within each classroom, describing them in detail in newsletters and electronic message boards, and sharing them with parents and community members. In addition, it is crucial for the school principals to not only "talk" but also "walk", by continually communicating the common goal and common interests, along with practicing and participating in strategies and activities that will help to achieve these goals.

The next recommendation is the use of authentic professional development. The exemplars demonstrated numerous strategies, policies, and practices that allow for increased professional development opportunities for faculty. One of the most unique recommendations was the creation of the Professional Development Coordinator position, which was help by a teacher and served as liaison between the administration and teachers. By selecting a teacher to assume this position, this has allowed the principal the opportunity to involve a stakeholder with the ability to assume the trust of their colleagues and at the same time inform the principal about their varying needs. This position eliminates much of the disconnect between what a principal and teachers may think a school needs in terms of professional development.

Professional development can also be a teacher-led endeavor. One school personified this idea with the creation of a multi-level professional development model led exclusively by

teachers. Rather than using external consultants, this school trained teachers to conduct in-house professional development. Teachers then would also conduct workshops and trainings for parents. This practice encourages professional growth for both teachers and parents by engaging these stakeholders in authentic learning opportunities. This type of collaboration may lead to increased parental involvement, enhanced teaching and learning, and increased efficacy in the teacher leadership abilities of those conducting the training.

The building of relationships between all stakeholders and the establishment of open lines of communication is the final, and ultimately, most important recommendation for educators. Within each of the participating schools it was clear that the principals strived to enhance communication and relationships with the school community. Whether it is through an open door policy, by sitting in on a grade-level meeting, or inviting parents to partake in a lesson, each of these school leaders demonstrated a commitment to working, communicating, and collaborating with the school community.

The clearest examples of the successful communication policies were found in the schools where an abundance of venues were utilized to not only disseminate, but also utilize information. Newsletters, email, electronic message boards and meetings were all employed to share information. Principals were also present and available to teachers by conducting “walk-throughs” and having an open door policy for teachers and parents, which demonstrates a commitment to both written and verbal communication.

Beyond the mere use of communication to share information, the idea of using the information to inform practice is the next crucial step. Meetings, newsletters, and data-reports can only inform and will not impact teacher efficacy or student achievement unless policies are implemented to use the information to influence practice and policy. Each of the exemplar

principals used a variation of meetings, professional development workshops, and discussion with teachers to examine data (in various forms) to help meet the needs of students. One principal affirmed that the open lines of communication have been established to help target the specific needs of students. When teachers, parents and administrators communicate in a manner that informs and is guided by the common goals of the school, it will significantly influence teaching and learning.

Collaborative and collegial relationship building policies were also evident as principals demonstrated the various ways in which they valued the involvement and expertise of teachers and parents. By providing opportunities for school activities and policies based on teacher and parent recommendations, the principal is demonstrating to the school community that they are partners in the education of the children. By being an active presence in the school and in the community, these principals are also illustrating their commitment to being actively engaged in fortifying these relationships. Finally, each of the participants stated that their ultimate goal as principal is to increase student achievement and this exemplifies that true nature of their commitment to the children and school communities. Deal & Peterson (1999), contend that higher achieving schools were those that demonstrated cultures that fostered collaboration, empowerment, and engagement and the school principals interviewed demonstrated numerous strategies and practices instrumental in leading their schools towards these goals.

Suggestions for Additional Research.

Research in the following areas may further enhance the understanding of the relationships between teacher quality characteristics, school culture, educational leadership and their influence upon student outcomes. One of the most compelling outcomes from the research was the fact that the sample population experienced fewer excessive absences and out-of-school suspensions in relation to the state averages (Figure 3-3). The teacher demographics were also examined to

compare the sample schools with the state averages. The teacher demographic data revealed that the sample population possessed higher percentages of teachers with advanced degrees, those teaching within field, and those with certification (Figure 3-2). The most surprising element of this data is the percentage of high-poverty students enrolled in the sample population schools, which more than doubled the national averages (Figure 3-1). This demographic data sharply contradicts current research, which contends that high poverty schools are more likely to experience increased attendance issues and employ a higher percentage of teachers without the characteristics of teacher quality (Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2002; Reeves, 2003).

Numerous research topics may emerge from the study of the sample population in relation to the data. Suggestions may include the examination of the student outcomes and how they may be influenced by the practices taking place in schools. These schools have a significantly higher percentage of high-poverty students than state and national averages; yet experience fewer suspensions and excessive absences. Why? Is it the curriculum, the school policies, or school-community collaboration? Further research examining the factors that may influence these outcomes may augment this study, which found that teacher collaboration, out-of field teaching percentage, and certified teachers had a predictive association upon these outcomes.

In addition, a more detailed understanding of the hiring practices may also be helpful to explain how the sample population schools are able to employ faculty that possess many of the characteristics research has equated with teacher quality. What are these school principals doing to attract these teachers and are these practices and policies replicable by other schools or districts. This comprehensive research will further enrich the literature base and equip school districts with increased understanding of additional ways of recruiting and retaining quality teachers.

The next suggestion for additional research would be a replication of the current study with a larger and more diverse sample. Sample schools may include those from different regions of the state or country, secondary and middle schools, and those varying in student and teacher population demographics. Increasing the number of participating schools and varying the sample may lead to increased generalizability.

Another suggestion would be the use of schools not participating in the Lastinger School reform initiative to serve as a control. The utilization of a control group would allow the researcher the opportunity to further measure the influence or lack thereof of the school reform initiatives taking place. This control group would allow for a better understanding of the relationship between the independent variables (teacher quality characteristics, school culture factors, school leadership practices) and the dependent variables (student suspensions and student attendance). If the schools participating in the reform initiatives show significant gains in relation to the control, then this research may ultimately validate the importance of such school reform and improvement initiatives.

Additional research would also be enhanced through the use of a more uniform and longer period of data collection. By going beyond a mere snapshot, examining the relationship between collaborative school culture, teacher quality characteristic and leadership with student outcomes over a longer period of time would be extremely valuable. In addition, this longitudinal research would allow for a more uniform data collection process whereas student, teacher, and school data could be analyzed during the same timeframe, thus eliminating one of the major delimitations of this research.

The performance framework model may also be adapted for additional research through the use of different independent and dependent variables. For example, the use of additional

assessment measures to examine the teaching and learning taking place in the sample schools could replace the school culture survey within the “process” component of the model. Analyzing such factors as student engagement, pedagogy, and content mastery are all variables that would further augment the significance of the research. The “inputs” may include teacher quality characteristic data such as participation in job-embedded professional development or multiple certifications. Finally, the “outputs” may examine student achievement data including standardized test scores, grade point averages, and even graduation rates (if the sample were expanded to include secondary schools).

There are also numerous opportunities for additional research in relation to the exemplar interviews. The first suggestion would be replication of the study with the inclusion of a larger sample of “exemplary Principal” interviews. The current study was limited due to the small sample size of the principals participating in the interview portion of the research. The inclusion of additional “best practices” will help to better inform practice and describe the numerous ways in which school leaders are implementing practices, policies, and strategies that are improving student achievement. In addition, research with the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders in the interviews may serve to augment the value of the study. By understanding their beliefs, perceptions, and practices of teachers, students, and even parents as it relates to a collaborative school culture or increased student outcomes may reveal valuable information for harnessing the influence of these stakeholders to influence teaching and learning. The factors that lead to an increased student attendance or a collaborative culture may be different for parents and teachers and this knowledge will serve to demonstrate how to implement policies, practices, and procedures needed to meet their needs.

The final suggestion for additional research would be the adaptation of the data collection process. The first adaptation would be to conduct exemplar interviews in a more open and trusting manner. The exemplar phone interview responses were bland and generic, decreasing the true intent of the interviews themselves. The principals were selected based on their score on a survey and not their willingness to share and the comfort level with the researcher. It may require the researcher to use a staff member within the school to help with the interview or even enlist those being interviewed to shape the context and goals of the interview, so that they feel that they are involved and they see the value of the end product. If the researcher can create an environment where those being interviewed feel comfortable enough to fully share their expertise, then, and only then, can this data be considered valuable.

The next adaptation would be research that incorporated the quantitative data into the interview questions. There would be so much more value placed upon the interview questions if they were based upon the school culture survey or teacher quality characteristics data. How powerful would their responses be if the questions were adjusted to reflect the actual data? For example,

1. “What strategies, practices, and policies have enhanced the ability of teachers to collaborate and engage in constructive communication?” Instead would become,
 - a. “The data revealed that as teacher collaboration increased within a school, student suspensions decreased by nearly 7%. What factors do you believe contribute to this association and what strategies do you utilize to increase opportunities for teacher collaboration.”

Ultimately, this study has served as a helpful tool to examine the relationships between teacher quality characteristics, school culture factors, leadership, and student outcomes with a context of a school reform initiative. Yet, the true value in this study may come in the future research, research that includes a larger and more diverse sample, research that includes a more comprehensive and uniform data collection process, research using additional variables and

assessment methods, and research that includes a variety of stakeholders to better inform practice.

APPENDIX A SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY

We are asking that you complete this survey designed to assess school culture and teacher perceptions of student learning in your school. The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. After completing this survey, place it back into the envelope, seal it, and then return it to the designated person.

Should you choose not to participate, place the unused answer sheet and survey into the envelope, seal it, and then return it to the designated person. Participation is voluntary and there will be no consequences should you decide not to participate. All necessary actions to retain respondent anonymity have been taken. The research project will assess building-level culture and teacher perceptions of student learning; therefore no individuals will be identified.

It is our intent to provide your school with information regarding the culture of your school. With this information, teachers and leaders may work to shape a culture that is conducive to higher student achievement.

To what degree do these statements describe your perceptions of student learning at your school?

Please fill in the appropriate circle to rate each statement on the following scale:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

**Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree**

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 1. | My success or failure in teaching students is due primarily to factors beyond my control rather than to my own efforts and ability. |
| 2. | I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher. |
| 3. | I am certain I am making a difference in the lives of students. |
| 4. | The attitudes and habits my students bring to my class greatly reduce their chances for academic success. |
| 5. | Many of the students I teach are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them. |
| 6. | I feel responsible for the students I teach but not for other students in the school. |
| 7. | In this school, are you likely to experience the following consequence as a direct result of your students' academic success or failure: public recognition in meetings of the faculty or the larger community, in school publications, or in the mass media and press? |
| 8. | Teachers are expected to help maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their classroom. |
| 9. | The level of student misbehavior (e.g., noise, horseplay or fighting in the halls, cafeteria, or student lounge) and/or drug or alcohol use in this school interferes with my teaching. |
| 10. | To what extent do you feel that you have been successful in providing the kind of education you would like to provide for students in your classes this year? |

Please complete the following background questions. This data is for research disaggregation only and your answers will be anonymous. When you have completed this survey, place it back into the envelope, seal it, and then return it to the designated person.

1. What is your primary assignment?
 - q Classroom teacher (including special education)
 - w Art, Music, PE teacher, Speech
 - e Administration
 - r Instructional Support (reading, behavior, ...)
 - t School Support Staff (custodial, secretarial, ...)
 - y Other (specify) _____
2. What grade level(s) are you currently teaching?
 - q Pre-K
 - w Grades K-2
 - e Grades 3-5
 - r Special Education
 - t Multi-grade Specialist (Art, Music, PE)
 - y Middle School: subject(s)
3. How many years (including this year) have you been an educator?
 - q 1 to 2 years
 - w 3 to 5 years
 - e 6 to 10 years
 - r 11 to 19 years
 - t 19 + years
4. How many years (including this year) have you been at your present school?
 - q 1 to 2 years
 - w 3 to 5 years
 - e 6 to 10 years
 - r 11 to 19 years
 - t 19 + years
5. What degrees do you have (mark all that apply)?
 - q Bachelors in education
 - w Bachelors in another field
 - e Masters in education
 - r Masters in another field
 - t Post-masters in education
 - y Post-masters in another field
6. What is your race?
 - q African American
 - w Asian/Pacific Islander
 - e American Indian / Alaskan Native
 - r Caucasian / White
 - t Hispanic
 - y Other
7. What is your gender?
 - q Female
 - w Male
8. If you are currently on continuing contract...
 - q I will return to this school
 - w I will not return to this school
9. If you are not currently on continuing contract...
 - q If eligible I will return to this school
 - w If eligible I will not return to this school

To what degree do these statements describe the conditions at your school?

Please fill in the appropriate circle to rate each statement on the following scale:

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

1.	Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.
2.	Leaders value teachers' ideas.
3.	Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and
4.	Teachers trust each other.
5.	Teachers support the mission of the school.
6.	Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.
7.	Leaders in this school trust the professional judgments of teachers.
8.	Teachers spend considerable time planning together.
9.	Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.
10.	Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.
11.	Leaders take time to praise teachers that perform well.
12.	The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.
13.	Parents trust teachers' professional judgments.
14.	Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.
15.	Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.
16.	Professional development is valued by the faculty.
17.	Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.
18.	Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together.
19.	Teachers understand the mission of the school.
20.	Teachers are kept informed on current issues in the school.
21.	Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.
22.	My involvement in policy or decision making is taken seriously.
23.	Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.
24.	Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.
25.	Teachers work cooperatively in groups.
26.	Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.
27.	The school mission statement reflects the values of the community.
28.	Leaders support risk-taking and innovation in teaching.
29.	Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects.
30.	The faculty values school improvement.
31.	Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school.

32. Administrators protect instruction and planning time.
33. Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.
34. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.
35. Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage mentally in class and complete homework assignments.

Developed at the Middle Level Leadership Center, University of Missouri by Gruenert & Valentine (1998)
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APPENDIX B
SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY FACTORS AND ITEMS (GRUENERT AND VALENTINE,
1998)

Collaborative Leadership

- 2. Leaders value teachers' ideas.
- 7. Leaders in this school trust the professional judgments of teachers.
- 11. Leaders take time to praise teachers that perform well.
- 14. Teachers are involved in the decision-making process.
- 18. Leaders in our school facilitate teachers working together.
- 20. Teachers are kept informed on current issues in the school.
- 22. My involvement in policy or decision making is taken seriously.
- 26. Teachers are rewarded for experimenting with new ideas and techniques.
- 28. Leaders support risk-taking and innovation in teaching.
- 32. Administrators protect instruction and planning time.
- 34. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas.

Teacher Collaboration

- 3. Teachers have opportunities for dialogue and planning across grades and subjects.
- 8. Teachers spend considerable time planning together.
- 15. Teachers take time to observe each other teaching.
- 23. Teachers are generally aware of what other teachers are teaching.
- 29. Teachers work together to develop and evaluate programs and projects.
- 33. Teaching practice disagreements are voiced openly and discussed.

Professional Development

- 1. Teachers utilize professional networks to obtain information and resources for classroom instruction.
- 9. Teachers regularly seek ideas from seminars, colleagues, and conferences.
- 16. Professional development is valued by the faculty.
- 24. Teachers maintain a current knowledge base about the learning process.
- 30. The faculty values school improvement.

Unity of Purpose

- 5. Teachers support the mission of the school.
- 12. The school mission provides a clear sense of direction for teachers.
- 19. Teachers understand the mission of the school.
- 27. The school mission statement reflects the values of the community.
- 31. Teaching performance reflects the mission of the school.

Collegial Support

- 4. Teachers trust each other.
- 10. Teachers are willing to help out whenever there is a problem.
- 17. Teachers' ideas are valued by other teachers.
- 25. Teachers work cooperatively in groups.

Learning Partnership

- 6. Teachers and parents have common expectations for student performance.
- 13. Parents trust teachers' professional judgments.
- 21. Teachers and parents communicate frequently about student performance.
- 35. Students generally accept responsibility for their schooling, for example they engage mentally in class and complete homework assignments.

APPENDIX C
EXEMPLAR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Collaborative Leadership: What strategies, practices, and policies have you implemented that have enhanced the collaborative relationships you have with your faculty?
2. Teacher Collaboration: What strategies, practices, and policies have enhanced the ability of teachers to collaborate and engage in constructive communication?
3. Professional Development: What strategies, policies, or practices have you implemented that allow for increased professional development opportunities for faculty?
4. Unity of Purpose: Describe how you have emphasized the importance of a common mission or vision for your school?
5. Collegial Support: Describe the ways that you have helped to facilitate opportunities for teachers to work together effectively.
6. Learning Partnership: Describe the ways that you have helped to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and (or) students to work together.

APPENDIX D
EXEMPLAR INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Question s	Question 1: Collaborative Leadership: What strategies, practices, and policies have you implemented that have enhanced the collaborative relationships you have with your faculty?	Question 2: Teacher Collaboration: What strategies, practices, and policies have enhanced the ability of teachers to collaborate and engage in constructive communication ?	Question 3: Professional Development : What strategies, policies, or practices have you implemented that allow for increased professional development opportunities for faculty?	Question 4: Unity of Purpose: Describe how you have emphasized the importance of a common mission or vision for your school?	Question 5: Collegial Support: Describe the ways that you have helped to facilitate opportunities for teachers to work together effectively.	Question 6: Learning Partnership: Describe the ways that you have helped to provide opportunities for teachers, parents, and (or) students to work together.
Principa l (A)	I am in the classrooms, I am a presence in the building, they can come to me with any issue, open-door policy, open lines of communication, enhance their ability, discuss the data-targeting specific students,	Technology has enhanced communication (i.e, email). Faculty meetings set up with small group activities, monthly faculty meeting and grade level meeting with departmental chairs	Hosted district meetings and teachers have hosted pd activities. PD coordinator* position - teacher	Mission and vision posted in each class, common goal is student achievement- the most important component of a school mission/vision.	x	PTA involvement, parents feel welcome, I want to include parents in their child's education, they have a room set aside, adopt a classroom program, cultivate that energy from the parents. 100% teacher membership in PTSA, PTA overhauled teacher lounge. teachers also have many of their own children, Garage sale and carnival in the spring.

Principal (B)	Ten-year principal role has helped to increase collaboration, interview questions focus on collaboration and collegiality	Scheduling time for teachers to meet, weekly meetings-plc, common meeting times,	"walk throughs" and input from teachers, meeting their needs, started with Lastinger with "book studies" , inquiry action projects, I am involved as well	Making sure children are at the appropriate reading level and doing all that it takes to achieve that goal, respect for each other.	Monday plc meetings, cross -grade level meetings, coaching model-peer observations	First report card night-social event: students, parents and teachers meet together to discuss reports. "Parent University Classes" seminars based on requested topics such as FCAT, reading support or bullying. Sessions done by school staff or community resources. Open-door policy to accommodate the unique needs of the parents.
Principal (C)	We hold frequent grade level meetings to discuss data and how to use the data to inform instruction. Data is shared with teachers, EESAC, and community members regularly to keep them informed of the school's performance.	Grade level/department meetings are very useful for teachers to exchange successful strategies that are working in their classroom. Articulation meetings are also held with vertical groups to ensure that everyone is working towards a common goal.	The Reading Leadership Team has attended summer sessions sponsored by FLARE, Florida Leadership and Reading Excellence Center. Teachers that have attended these sessions have presented to the faculty. Other faculty members that have attended workshops outside of the school have presented to the faculty during staff meetings or professional development days.	Constant reinforcement and communication of our common mission/vision is achieved through slogans, ed-connect messages, monthly newsletter, parent meetings, and open door policy with all stakeholders.	Facilitating grade level meetings to share strategies and lessons learned. it is so important to provide adequate coverage to ensure that teachers could watch and learn from each other without impeding the academic growth of the children.	Through newsletter, ed connect messages, and that through continual communication , relationships with the community were dramatically enhanced.”.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew A. Ohlson was born in Boston, Massachusetts. The oldest of 4 siblings, Matthew spent his childhood in East Boston and Winthrop, Massachusetts, graduating with honors from St. Dominic Savio High School in 1992. Matthew then earned his B.A. in Sociology with a concentration in Elementary Education from Brandeis University in 1996.

Upon graduating in 1996, Matthew began his career in education as a long-term substitute teacher of a 4th grade classroom at the McKay School in East Boston. From there, he became the computer teacher and later, Technology Director, at the Patrick Lyndon School in Boston. In his decade long career as a Boston teacher, Matthew was recognized as a LEAD Teacher in 1992 and later a semi-finalist for the 2004 National Educational Technology Leader of the Year.

In May of 2009, Matthew received his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Florida where he has served as a leadership facilitator with the Lastinger Center for Learning as well as a graduate teaching assistant with the Department of Educational Administration and Policy. Matthew's teaching and research agenda has centered upon school improvement, technology leadership, and data-driven decision-making. His work has also focused on K-20 partnerships, culminating with the creation of the nationally recognized leadership-mentoring program called CAMP (Collegiate Achievement Mentoring Program) Gator. Matthew has recently been recognized as a two-time recipient of the nationally competitive Kappa Delta Pi scholarship for instructional leadership (2006 & 2007) and the 2009 University of Florida's College of Education Presidential Fellow nominee.

Matthew has been married to Tiffany Ohlson (University of Florida) for 7 years and they have two boys: Gabriel, 5; and Brady, 2.