

The Effects of School Climate on Student Achievement,
Parent/Community Perceptions and Staff Effectiveness

A Special Project

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FACULTY APPROVAL

The Effects of School Climate on Student Achievement,
Parent/Community Perceptions and Staff Effectiveness

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The researcher conducted surveys that were presented to teachers, parents and children. The surveys were intended to discover the perception of climate in a small Eastern Washington school. The surveys were given in the fall during parent teacher conferences and then again in the spring during the second round of conferences. The researcher discovered that climate was very important in the school and that perceptions differed depending on the clientele and discovered that children responded favorably to positive climate.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

School climate was a concern regarding public perception, staff awareness and student achievement at the school the researcher studied. The elementary school previously had a principal that had been an administrator for fifteen years. The principal was moved to a new school and replaced by a new principal that had been serving in an administrative role but not as a principal. The new principal was in the elementary school for three years before the surveys were given.

Surveys were given in the fall during parent teacher conferences. Parents filled out the surveys at the conference and surveys were returned right after the conference to ensure quick turn around and more responses. Students were given the surveys during classes and teachers filled out staff surveys at meetings late in the second semester.

Student surveys were given to fourth grade students as fourth grade students were the eldest students in the elementary school. The surveys were modified to make answers easy to understand for fourth graders. A smiley face was used as a positive or yes answer and a frown face was used as a negative or no answer. The student surveys were only ten questions long and were written to fourth grade level.

Teacher surveys were written with two lines for each question. The questions were written so teachers could answer the way the teachers felt the perception of the building was and a second line was used to rate how the teacher

personally felt about the importance of the climate issue. After the surveys were completed, the information was shared to improve areas that needed improvement and celebrated positive impact in other areas.

Statement of the Problem

Student achievement, parent/community perceptions and staff effectiveness were affected by positive school climate. Administrators were looking for ways to improve the elementary school to continue meeting adequate yearly progress on the *Washington Assessment of Student Learning*. The researcher modified surveys found in the booklet, *NINE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOLS A RESEARCH-BASED RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS TO ASSIST WITH IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING* released from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI, June 2007). The surveys results showed strengths and weaknesses regarding climate.

Purpose of the Project

The researcher intended to use the surveys to improve student achievement, parent/community perceptions and staff effectiveness. The researcher accomplished this by sharing the results with the participants who took part in the survey. The results of the surveys showed strengths and weaknesses of the climate in the school.

Delimitations

The demographics taken from the OSPI school report card showed the following for the elementary school used for this project. Nearly eighty percent of the students were white with the next closest ethnic group being Hispanic at

sixteen percent. The surveys reflected the same percentages from parents and students. There were twenty four teachers in the survey with twenty two female and two male teachers in the classrooms. The average teaching experience was fourteen and a half years with fifty percent of the teachers having at least a master's degree. In October 2006, the student's count was three hundred seventy seven students with 49.3% boys and 50.7% girls. Ethnicity was divided as 79.3% White, 16.2% Hispanic, 2.4% Asian, and 1.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native and .8% Black. Students receiving free or reduced lunches were 47.2% with 16% special education and 1.5% migrant. The unexcused absence rate was .4% during the 2006 – 07 school years. (OSPI Report Card)

Assumptions

The elementary school used during the research was meeting Adequate Yearly Progress and showed the largest strengths in reading and writing. Mathematics scores on the *Washington Assessment of Student Learning* were low statewide and the bar was raised the next year for the Adequate Yearly Progress. Although the school was feeling successful, administrators were looking for any way possible to increase student achievement. The researcher looked at school climate to determine if improvements could be made. The researcher knew that access to parents would be easy at the fall parent teacher conferences and for the best results parents would fill surveys out at the conferences and return surveys on the same day.

Research Question

Does school climate affect student achievement, parent/community perceptions and staff effectiveness?

Significance of the Project

Positive school climate was proven to increase student achievement, parent/community perceptions and staff effectiveness. Student attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors were vital to success in school (Sisson, 2001). Administrators and teachers assumed students and parents felt better about schools after seeing where the weakness and strengths in climate were at the school as a result of the findings in the surveys.

Procedure

School climate was a concern regarding public perception, staff awareness and student achievement at the elementary school that the researcher studied. The building principal was in place for the last three years. She wanted to know what the perception was in her building regarding school climate.

Surveys were given in the fall during parent teacher conferences. Parents filled out the surveys at the parent conferences and the surveys were returned right after the conference to ensure quick turn around and more responses. Students were given the surveys during classes and teachers filled out staff surveys at meetings in the spring.

Student surveys were given to fourth grade students. Fourth graders were the eldest students in the building. The surveys were modified to make answers easy to understand. A smiley face was used as a positive or yes answer and a frown face was used as a negative or no answer. The student surveys were only ten questions long and were written to fourth grade level.

Teacher surveys were written with two lines for each question. The questions were written so teachers could answer the way the teacher felt the perception of the building was and a second line was used to rate how the teacher personally felt about the importance of the climate issue. After the surveys were completed the information was shared to determine areas that needed improvement and celebrated positive impact in other areas.

Definition of Terms

school climate – School climate was defined as the experience that students and staff encountered in a school building regarding safety, educational rigor, staff effectiveness and community perception.

Acronyms

AYP - Adequate Yearly Progress

OSPI - Office of the Superintendent of Public Education

WASL – Washington Assessment of Student Learning

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

School climate was a concern regarding public perception, staff awareness and student achievement at the elementary school that the researcher studied. The building principal was in place for the last three years. She wanted to know what the perception was in her building regarding school climate.

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Defining School Climate

School reform was essential to schools trying to find ways to improve WASL scores. Teachers tried to improve curriculum and assessments helping to raise the standard of education in teachers' classrooms. Teachers raised standards across the state and still struggled to meet AYP on a school-to-school basis. The researcher found before teachers and administrators looked at new curriculum, teachers should first look at school climate. Surveys given to parents, students and staff gave administrators and staff an understanding of building climate. Participants interested in school improvement looked at the building deficits and strengths in school climate and culture before considering curriculum change. The researcher defined climate as the relationship between administration and staff and students working together to create positive outcomes in education and the general building morale. When the teaching staff felt supported then all of the other "things" that made up a school day fit together in a positive way.

The researcher found school climate was defined in many different ways. Gonder and Hymes wrote, "school climate reflected the physical and psychological aspects of the school that were more susceptible to change and provided the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place"(p.2). The culture of a building also affected student learning but was defined as shared ideas like "assumptions, values, and beliefs giving a building identity and standard for expected behaviors" (p.1) (Gonder, P.O., &Hymes, D. 1994).

Jerald wrote more about norms and values. The staff and administration agreed about norms and values in the school. A truly positive school climate was

not characterized simply by the absence of gangs, violence, or discipline problems, but also by the presence of a set of norms and values focusing staff attention on what was most important and motivated staff to work diligently toward a common purpose. (Jerald, 2006)

According to Vander Ark (2002), another prominent factor that determined school climate was leadership. “Leaders of small schools maintained a clear vision, facilitating the design of a curriculum aligning with this vision, as well as appropriate organization and use of technology and facilities”(p.4). Administrators needed to be able to share responsibilities and tasks with the people that worked in the building. Responsibility sharing showed the professionals that worked in the building that staff was respected and valued. Leaders who micro-managed and could not let staff lead were perceived as leaders who did not trust or consider the people working in a school as competent employees (Vander Ark, 2002).

Students also needed to be able to have a voice to create a positive climate. Alfie Kohn wrote four things were created when students had a voice in schools. First, positive climate created a general well being. Students felt good about being at school because the student felt like part of the team. Second was positive climate affected behavior and values. When students were able to take responsibility for actions taken with reinforcement from teachers the behaviors were better. Third was positive climate affected academic achievement. Students who felt empowered were self motivated and achieved higher academically. Finally the fourth was when students were able to have a voice in schools. When teachers shared the decision making process with students the job of the teacher

became more interesting and easier. Students and teachers were partners in the school. (Sisson, 2001)

School Size and the Effect on Climate

Cotton (1996, 2001) concluded smaller schools produced better academic results and provided a better school climate. Many of the studies conducted showed mixed results for school size. While both large and small schools proved or disproved academic success, the biggest factor for negative impact was socioeconomic status. The elementary school in the study had over 40% students qualifying for free and reduced lunches, which suggested socioeconomic issues were part of the issues that the school faced as a challenge. The school enjoyed educational success and met AYP. When the goals became higher, the teachers, parents and administrators wanted to be able to find ways to help students become successful regardless of other challenges outside of school. (Stevenson, 2006)

According to Vander Ark (2002),” small schools had higher attendance rates and lower dropout rates, small school students had higher grade point averages, and students and teachers reported greater satisfaction with the school experience”(p.1). Buoyed by research and increased momentum around the issue of small schools, more school leaders considered redesigning the facilities with size as the guiding force. And though size was only one component of what made a good school, school size was a necessary component with tremendous ripple effects (Vander Ark 2002).

Vander Ark supported smaller school size but suggested a common set of characteristics creating a good school climate. Administrators in small schools

had to maintain a clear vision that had curriculum aligned to the vision as well as appropriate use of technology and facilities. The administrators also had to be good at distributing leadership management tasks across the staff. While school size was perceived as an important influence, school size had to be viewed in the context of other influences to determine school size contribution to school-level achievement (Abbott, Joireman, Stroh, 2002).

Changing School Culture to Improve Climate

Administration perception of building climate was good. The principal perceived the climate at the elementary that the community, teacher and student surveys were implemented was perceived as good by the staff and administration. Most teachers had been at the elementary school for nearly ten years and were perceived as the leaders of collaboration and teamwork in the district. Students were achieving high marks in reading and writing on the WASL. Mathematics and science were not the main focus of the curriculum. The school was even called a “reading school”. Student achievement was important to the staff and administration. School climate was a focus that the administration wanted to study to determine what, if anything, could be done to make improvements in building climate. Students who felt an attachment to school did better academically and socially than siblings who did not (Libbey, 2004). The researcher wanted to find out what variables were necessary for a positive school climate.

Marshall (2007) reported that “researchers had identified the following factors that influenced school climate:

1. Number and quality of interactions between adults and students.

2. Students and teachers perception of school environment, or the school's personality
3. Environmental factors (such as the physical building and classrooms, and materials used for instruction)
4. Academic performance
5. Feelings of safeness and school size
6. Feelings of trust and respect for students and teachers" (p.1).

Clearly, school climate was multi-dimensional and influenced many individuals, including students, parents, school personnel, and the community (Marshall, 2002). Stakeholders, including teachers, counselors and administrators, needed to believe students' needs were important and that student attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors were vital to success in school (Sisson, 2001).

According to Craig Jerald:

“Walk into any truly excellent school and you can feel it almost immediately a calm, orderly atmosphere that hums with an exciting, vibrant sense of purposefulness just under the surface. Students carry themselves with poise and confidence. Teachers talk about their work with intensity and professionalism. And despite the sense of serious business at hand, both teachers and students seem happy and confident rather than stressed. Everyone seems to know who they are and why they are there, and children and staff treats each other with the respect due to full partners in an important enterprise. (Jerald, 2006, p.1)

Teachers in the elementary school needed “buy in” if culture change was needed. Without a healthy school culture, staff would not be open or receptive to professional learning opportunities. (Madsen-Copas, Penelope and Wagner, 2002)

Tableman (2004) suggested that to change climate the principal had to play the primary role of supporter. Climate changed when the principal supported the staff. When the teachers were supported, the students were supported.

Tableman (2004) also suggested that support had to come from the top administrators and school board and that climate change would only occur when the culture of the entire district was committed to change.

Summary

Dufour suggested that “changed schools would encounter conflict. Conflict was not a matter of if conflict would happen, but when” (p. 1). When professional learning communities encountered conflict positive climate and culture of the school would enable school staff to work out the conflict in a positive way. (Dufour, 2004) Regular check ups done by administration was important to keep a clear vision as well. Anderson concluded:

Schools needed to assess climate regularly, school leaders monitored the affects of change in the school and act accordingly. Principals had to hold the teachers to the standard that all students learned. When the teachers, students and community all had a clear vision of where teachers, students and community were going without excuses, climate and culture of the schools were ones of learning and trust. With variables that were consistent with good climate and high achievement several variables had to be in place. There had to be good rapport between staff and

administration. “The school staff needed to be involved in decision making along with good communication and strong administrative leadership in instruction” (Anderson, 1982, p.3).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of Data

Introduction

School climate was a concern regarding public perception, staff awareness and student achievement at the elementary school that the researcher studied. The new principal was in the elementary school for three years before the surveys were given. She was interested in building climate and agreed to help with the surveys.

Methodology

Surveys were given in the fall during parent teacher conferences. Parents filled out the surveys at the parent conferences and the surveys were returned right after the conference to ensure quick turn around and more responses. Students were given the surveys during classes and teachers filled out staff surveys at meetings in the spring.

Student surveys were given to fourth grade students, as fourth graders were the eldest students in the building. The surveys were modified to make answers easy to understand. A smiley face was used as a positive or yes answer and a frown face was used a negative or no answer. The student surveys were only ten questions long and were written to fourth grade level.

Teacher surveys were written with two lines for each question. The questions were written so teachers could answer the way the teacher felt the perception of the building was and a second line was used to rate how the teacher personally felt about the importance of the climate issue. After the surveys were completed, the information was shared to determine areas needing improvement and celebrated positive impact in others. The general perception overall was reported as positive.

Participants

The demographics taken from the OSPI school report card showed the following for the school that was used for this project. Nearly eighty percent of the students were white with the next closest ethnic group being Hispanic at sixteen percent. The surveys reflected the same percentages from parents and students. There were twenty four teachers in the survey with twenty two female and two male teachers in the classrooms. The average teaching experience was fourteen and a half years with fifty percent of the teachers having at least a master's degree. In October 2006, the students count was three hundred seventy seven students with 49.3% boys and 50.7% girls. Ethnicity was divided as 79.3% White, 16.2% Hispanic, 2.4% Asian, and 1.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native and .8% Black. Students receiving free or reduced lunches were 47.2% with 16% special education and 1.5% migrant. The unexcused absence rate was .4% during the 2006 – 07 school years. (OSPI Report Card)

Instruments

The researcher used survey questions from the *Nine Characteristics of Highly Effective Schools*. (OSPI, June 2007) The researcher modified the length of the surveys to allow for faster turn around and survey returns. The researcher also modified the surveys for fourth grade students to assure readability ease and easy response by giving the respondents three choices for an answer and using faces instead of numbers.

Design

The research design was a qualitative research study with no baseline for data. There was a perceived feeling by administration and teachers about the general climate in the school as good. Parents, students and teachers were all given climate surveys and returned the surveys to the researcher. The surveys were tallied and the comments were recorded and printed in the report. The results were shared with the leadership team at the elementary school. The leadership team studied the results and decided if the leadership team wanted to take action.

Procedure

Surveys were given in the fall during parent teacher conferences. Parents filled out the surveys at the parent conferences and the surveys were returned right after the conference to ensure quick turn around and more responses. Students were given the surveys during classes and teachers filled out staff surveys at meetings in the spring.

Student surveys were given to fourth grade students, as fourth graders were the eldest students in the building. The surveys were modified to make answers easy to understand. A smiley face was used as a positive or yes answer

and a frown face was used a negative or no answer. The student surveys were only ten questions long and were written to fourth grade level.

Teacher surveys were written with two lines for each question. The questions were written so that teachers could answer the way the teacher felt the perception of the building was and a second line was used to rate how the teacher personally felt about the importance of the climate issue. After the surveys were completed, the information was shared to determine areas that needed improvement and celebrated positive impact in others.

Treatment of the Data

Data was collected from the surveys as they were handed in. The surveys from parents were done first with a population of 150 surveys with 67 percent returned. Sixty four student surveys were handed out and were given back the next day with a 100 percent quick turn around. Twenty four teacher surveys were handed out with 58 percent responses. The results were tallied using the number scale. Five was agreeing completely. Four was agreeing mostly. Three was agreeing moderately. Two was agreeing slightly. One was I don't agree at all and an "X" was used for not applicable. Students had faces instead of numbers to scale their answers. A straight face for I don't know. A frown face for I don't agree at all and a smiley face for I agree. In all cases the researcher used "NA" or a straight face for answers that were not answered in each of the surveys.

Summary

Parents, teachers and students were given the surveys. One hundred fifty surveys were handed out at conferences. One hundred one surveys were returned at a sixty seven percent return rate. Sixty four student surveys were handed out

and sixty four were returned at one hundred percent. Twenty four teacher surveys were handed out and fourteen were returned at a fifty eight percent return rate. All surveys returned were greater than 50%, which was the goal of the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

School climate was a concern regarding public perception, staff awareness and student achievement at the elementary school that the researcher studied. The elementary school had a principal that had been an administrator for fifteen years. The principal was moved to a new school and replaced by a new principal that was serving in an administrative role but not as a principal. The new principal was in the elementary school for three years before the surveys were given.

Description of the Environment

The OSPI report card reported the demographics for the elementary school used in this study at nearly eighty percent of the students were white with the next closest ethnic group being Hispanic at sixteen percent. The surveys reflected the same percentages from parents and students. There were twenty four teachers in the survey with twenty two female and two male teachers in the classrooms. The average teaching experience was fourteen and a half years with fifty percent of the teachers having at least a master's degree(OSPI Report Card, 2007). The community was economically supported by agriculture and supporting businesses.

Research Question

Does school climate effect student achievement, parent/community perceptions and staff effectiveness?

Results of the Study

The parent/community survey results showed that nearly ninety percent of the parents that responded to the survey feel welcome when parents visited the elementary school. Nearly ninety percent felt that children were safe at the elementary school. The widest ranges of answers from NA to agree completely were questions fifteen and sixteen. Question fifteen and sixteen were community involvement related. Sixteen parents answered NA for both questions. Some explanation may be that respondents were new to the school as noted in the survey comments. Overall the parent/community surveys were rated as favorable to positive climate perception. (Fig. 1)

The parent/community survey was also offered in Spanish for parents or guardians that either could not read English fluently or were more comfortable answering in Spanish. Only four respondents used the second language survey. One of the Spanish language surveys had a comment so the researcher included the Spanish comment in the group comments. Neither teachers nor students made comments on the surveys. (Fig. 2 and 3)

The staff perception of positive climate was also high. Eight teachers agreed completely and mostly that the staff worked in teams across grade levels to help increase student scores. Twelve teachers also indicated agree completely or mostly agree, teachers felt safe and the elementary school was conducive to learning. Not all of the teachers filled out the demographics section completely on the surveys. (Fig. 5)

Student perception of climate showed the highest agree completely ranking to questions nineteen and seven. The fourth grade students surveyed

indicated that fourth grade teachers helped students when students did not understand something. The students who participated in the survey indicated that adults who worked at the school cared about all students not just a few. Overall the student survey showed a positive climate. (Fig. 4)

Findings

Parent Survey

The question receiving the most strongly agree ranking was question number fourteen. “I feel welcome when I visit the school.” Question 14 received 70 agree completely, 20 agree mostly, seven agree moderately, two agree slightly and one not applicable.

The question receiving the most negative response was number seven. “Students receive detailed information about the work they do.” Question seven received four don’t agree at all, three agree slightly, 19 agree moderately, 42 agree mostly, 32 agree completely and two not applicable.

Academic measurement was addressed in questions two and four, which showed favorable agreements. Question two, “The school’s primary emphasis is improving student learning”, received 57 agree completely, 34 agree mostly, nine agree moderately and one not applicable. High standards were measured in question four. “All students in the school are expected to meet high standards.” 44 agree completely, 29 agree mostly 16 agree moderately, six agree slightly, three don’t agree at all and four were not applicable.

Safety and respect were measured in questions 10 and 19. Questions 10, “My child feels safe at school”, received 66 strongly agree, 31 agree mostly, three moderately agree, one agree slightly and one not applicable. Question 19,

“Students respect those that are different from them”, received 29 strongly agree, 40 mostly agree, 22 moderately agree, two slightly agree, one don’t agree at all and eight not applicable.

Community and communication were measured in questions 16 and 17. Question 16 was “The school works with many community organizations to support its’ students. This question received 32 agree completely, 39 agree mostly, 12 agree moderately, two agree slightly, one don’t agree at all and 16 not applicable. Question 17, “There is frequent two-way communication between school staff and families” received 38 agree completely, 37 agree mostly, 18 agree moderately, five agree slightly, two don’t agree at all and two not applicable.

School leadership perception was measured in question number nine and 13. “School leaders act fairly and with integrity” received 41 agree completely, 33 agree mostly, seventeen agree moderately, one agree slightly and nine not applicable. Question 13 “School leaders show they care about all students” received 63 completely agree, 29 mostly agree, nine agree moderately, one didn’t agree at all and four, not applicable.

Student Perception

The highest ranking question for I agree was question number 19. “The adults who work at my school care about all students not just a few” received 62 I agree and two I don’t know. The highest ranking question for don’t agree at all was question number 16. “Students respect those that are different from them.” Received eight don’t agree at all, 41 I agree and 15 I don’t know.

Safety and discipline were measured in questions 18 and 11. Question 18 “I feel safe when I am at school” received 58 I agree, three don’t agree at all and three I don’t know. Question 11, “Discipline problems are handled fairly” received 49 I agree, three don’t agree at all and 12 I don’t know.

Academics were measured in questions two and three. Question 2 “I know why it is important for me to learn what is being taught” received 54 I agree and 11 I don’t know. Question three “My classes challenge me to think and solve problems” received 50 I agree, four don’t agree at all and 10 I don’t know.

Leadership was measured in questions 12 and 13. Question 12 “Teachers are constantly trying to become better teachers” received 55 I agree and nine I don’t know. Question 13, “The adults in my school work well together” received 57 I agree and seven I don’t know.

Questions 19 and 20 were questions about perceived caring. Question 19, “The adults who work at my school care about all students, not just a few” received 62 I agree and two I don’t know. Question 20, “My teachers will contact my family if I am having problems learning” received 44 I agree, three don’t agree at all and 17 I don’t know.

Staff Perceptions

Personal

The highest ranking question for agree completely was question number 18, “I feel safe when I am at school” receiving 11 agree completely, one agree mostly and two not applicable. There were no questions that the staff didn’t agree with completely. There were three questions that staff moderately agreed with. Questions two, 11 and 20 all received three agree moderately rankings. Question

11, “Staff routinely works together to plan what will be taught” received 4 agree completely, three agree mostly, three agree moderately one agree slightly and three not applicable. Question two, “I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve”, received five agree completely, four agree mostly, three agree moderately and two not applicable. Question 20, “The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school” received three agree completely, six agree mostly, three agree moderately and two not applicable.

Professional development and trust in questions 10 and 13 received these ranges of responses. Question 10, “The staff works in teams across grade levels to help increase student learning”, received six agree completely, two agree mostly, two agree moderately, one agree slightly and two not applicable. Question 13, “Staff members trust one another”, received four agree completely, eight agree mostly and two not applicable.

Staff perception of the school

The highest ranking question for agree completely was question number 15, “I have enough opportunities to grow professionally” receiving 10 agree completely and four agree mostly. There were no questions that the staff didn’t agree with completely. There was one question that staff ranked highest as moderately agreed with. Question 12, “Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students”, received four agree completely, seven agree mostly and four agree moderately.

Professional development and trust in questions 10 and 13 received these ranges of responses. Question 10, “The staff works in teams across grade levels to

help increase student learning”, received eight agree completely, three agree mostly, two agree moderately, one agree slightly. Question 13, “Staff members trust one another”, received seven agree completely, six agree mostly and one agree moderately.

Discussion

The surveys showed positive climate as perceived by the public, teachers and students. There were small discrepancies between staff perception personally and how the perception of the building portrayed the elementary school. Collaborative decision making and professional learning communities helped strengthen the perceptions of team.

Students felt relatively safe and students were having academic needs met. Community perceptions were that the school was a good place to be overall. Not all surveys were answered completely. Some of the demographics were not answered.

Summary

School climate was found to be effective in student achievement, parent and community perception and staff effectiveness as measured in the surveys. The researcher found school climate to be positive overall all at the elementary school. Improvements could still be implemented to variables in each of the groups surveyed. Each of the groups surveyed had different ideas for strengths and weaknesses in the elementary school.

Teachers felt safe in the elementary school and needed to work on trust and communicating with families of the students. Students felt like the adults in the elementary school cared about all students not just a few. However the

students felt like other students didn't always respect students that were different from peers. Parents felt welcomed when parents visited the school but wanted more detailed information about the schoolwork students are bringing home.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

School climate was a concern regarding public perception, staff awareness and student achievement at the elementary school that the researcher studied. The new principal was in the elementary school for three years before the surveys were given. She wanted to survey the teachers, parents, students and community and found out the elementary school climate. The researcher made the surveys and reported the results.

Surveys were given in the fall. Parents filled out the surveys at the conference and surveys were returned right after the conference to ensure quick turn around and more responses. Students were given the surveys during classes and teachers filled out staff surveys at meetings in the spring.

Student surveys were given to fourth grade students, as fourth grade students were the eldest students in the elementary school. The surveys were modified to make answers easy to understand for fourth graders. A smiley face was used as a positive or yes answer and a frown face was used as a negative or no answer. The student surveys were only ten questions long and were written to fourth grade level.

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Summary

The researcher found school climate to be positive overall at the elementary school. Improvements could still be implemented to variables in each of the groups surveyed. Each of the groups surveyed had different ideas for strengths and weaknesses in the elementary school.

Teachers felt safe in the elementary school and needed to work on trust and communicating with families of the students. Students perceived the adults in the elementary school care about all students not just a few. However the students felt other students didn't always respect students that were different from peers. Parents felt welcomed when parents visited the school but wanted more detailed information about the schoolwork students were bringing home.

Conclusions

The climate at the elementary school was found to be positive. Parents felt welcome, students felt cared for and teachers felt safe. Surveys showed that the variables for each of the groups surveyed showed a general positive climate. Improvements to make a more positive climate included trust, communication and respect for others. While these areas were still surveyed as generally positive, teachers, students and parents felt there was room for improvement.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions revealed in the survey the researcher recommends that the results should be shared with the elementary school. Teachers, students and parents should feel good about being a part of the elementary school and should continue working on ways to improve the weaknesses found in the survey. Teachers felt safe in the elementary school and discuss teaching issues regularly. However the survey revealed that there is room for improvement in trusting one another and with communication to families. Students feel that adults in the building care about everyone, not just a few. This is definitely a positive climate variable. However students felt that not all students respect the differences of peers. Students and teachers can easily develop ways to improve on this weakness. Parents feel welcome in the elementary school. This was obvious when the researcher walked into the building. Parents were in the halls, classrooms and playground on any given day. The survey revealed that parents don't feel comfortable with the information given to parents about the work that was being sent home. Teachers forgot that learning styles and curriculum changed over time. Parents and guardians were taught differently than the children in the elementary school. Teachers will take curriculum change and learning styles into consideration as teachers send work home.

This report was a positive experience for the elementary school and for the researcher. The elementary school leadership team can take information drawn from the surveys and use it to improve the climate in the school.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1.

Parent/Community Survey

This survey relates to climate qualities at this school. Your views are important to help improve this school so that we are really doing what is best for kids. Please respond honestly to each statement below – your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a 5-point scale, with 1 meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and 5 meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the X when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) Mark one number for each statement.

Please provide some information below:

Gender: Male 11/Female 75
Not listed 12

Your race/ethnicity American Indian/Native American 1
 African American/Black 0
 Asian/Pacific Islander 3
 Hispanic/Latino 8
 White/Caucasian 74
 Multi-racial 1
 Not listed 11

Number of your children in this school: Average of two

Relationship to children in the school: Parent 86/Relative 2/Guardian/Other 10

Main language spoken at home: English 88/Spanish 8/ Other 2

Frequency of visits to the school: Never-0,Rarely-1,Sometimes-50,Often-30,Very Often-17

Grade of child(ren) attending this elementary school: Grade 1 -24
 Grade 2- 24
 Grade 3- 24
 Grade 4- 24

Think about this school as you read each statement below. Then **Circle** the number that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

How much do you agree with this statement?	NA	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to accomplish.	1	0	1	16	35	48
2. The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.	1	0	0	9	34	57
3. The school communicates its goals effectively to families and the community.	1	0	4	19	35	44
4. All students in the school are expected to meet high standards.	4	3	6	16	29	44
5. Students understand what they are supposed to learn.	4	0	3	20	41	30
6. Classes challenge students to think and solve problems.	4	0	1	11	45	41
7. Students receive detailed information about the work they do.	2	4	3	19	42	32
8. Teachers give students extra help if it is needed.	5	0	4	10	40	43
9. School leaders act fairly and with integrity.	9	0	1	17	33	41
10. My child feels safe at school.	1	0	1	3	31	66

11. The school environment is conducive to learning.	2	0	0	3	35	61
12. The teachers and other adults in my school show respect for each other.	8	1	0	8	27	48
13. School leaders show they care about all students.	4	1	0	9	29	63
14. I feel welcome when I visit the school.	1	0	2	7	20	70
15. Many parents and adults from the community come and help at the school.	16	0	1	8	42	34
16. The school works with many community organizations to support its students.	16	1	2	12	39	32
17. There is frequent two-way communication between school staff and families.	2	2	5	18	37	38
18. School staff listens carefully when I express my opinions and concerns.	1	0	7	11	30	54
19. Students respect those that are different from them.	8	1	2	22	40	29

20. Teachers will do whatever it takes to help all students meet high academic standards.	3	0	0	17	34	46
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Thank you for your input. Provide any comments you have below or attach them to this survey.

Comments:

Figure 2. Parent Survey in Spanish

ENCUESTA PARA PADRES/COMUNIDAD

Esta encuesta esta relacionada con la calidad del ambiente de la escuela . Sus puntos de vista son importantes para ayudar a mejorar la escuela y que nosotros realmente hagamos lo mejor por los niños. Por favor responda honestamente a cada afirmacion de abajo- sus repuestas permaneceran confidenciales.

Esta encuesta le tomara solo 10 minutos en contestar. Se usa una escala de 5 puntos, con 1 significa que usted “no esta deacuerdo” con la afirmacion, y 5 significa que usted “esta completamente deacuerdo.” (Use una X cuando usted no sepa la respuesta o la afirmacion no corresponde). Marque un numero por cada afirmacion.

Porfavor provea la informacion de abajo:

Genero: Masculino/Femenino

Su raza/etnia	Indio Americano/Nativo Americano	Americano Africano/Negro
	Asiatico/ Isla Pacifico	Hispano/Latino
	Blanco/Caucasico	Multi-racial

Numero de niños en la escuela:____

Relacion con el alumno en la escuela: Padres/ Familiar/Tutor/Otro

Lenguaje que se habla en casa:_____

Frecuencia de visitas a la escuela: Nunca/Raramente/Algunas veces/Seguido/Muy Seguido

Grado al que asisten sus hijos en la escuela:_____

Piense en la escuela cada vez que usted lea cada afirmacion abajo. Luego marque con un CIRCULO el numero que mejor describe lo mucho que usted esta deacuerdo con la afirmacion.

Que tan de acuerdo esta usted con esto?	NA	No estoy de acuerdo	Un poco de acuerdo	Moderadamente de acuerdo	De acuerdo	Completamente de acuerdo
1. Tengo completo conocimiento de lo que la escuela trata de llevar acabo.	X	1	2	3	4	5
2. El principal enfatiza de la escuela es mejorar el aprendizaje de alumnos	X	1	2	3	4	5
3. La escuela comunica sus metas efectivamente a las familias y la comunidad.	X	1	2	3	4	5
4. Se espera que todos los alumnos alcancen altos niveles	X	1	2	3	4	5
5. Alumnos entienden lo que se supone deben aprender.	X	1	2	3	4	5
6. Las clases retan a los alumnos a pensar y resolver	X	1	2	3	4	5
7. Los alumnos reciben informacion detallada acerca del trabajo que deben hacer.	X	1	2	3	4	5
8. Maestros proveen ayuda extra si es que la necesitan los alumnos	X	1	2	3	4	5
9. Lideres de la escuela actuan con justicia e integridad	X	1	2	3	4	5

10. Mi hijo se siente seguro en la escuela	X	1	2	3	4	5
11. El ambiente de la escuela conduce hacia el aprendizaje.	X	1	2	3	4	5
12. Los maestros y otros adultos en mi escuela muestran respeto unos a otros.	X	1	2	3	4	5
13. Los líderes escolares muestran su preocupación por los alumnos	X	1	2	3	4	5
14. Me siento bienvenido cuando visito la escuela	X	1	2	3	4	5
15. Muchos familiares y adultos de la comunidad vienen y ayudan en la escuela	X	1	2	3	4	5
16. La escuela trabaja con muchas organizaciones para apoyar a los alumnos	X	1	2	3	4	5
17. Frecuentemente hay formas de comunicación entre el personal de la escuela y las familias	X	1	2	3	4	5
18. El personal de la escuela escucha cuidadosamente cuando usted expresa sus opiniones o dudas.	X	1	2	3	4	5

19. Los alumnos respetan a quienes son diferentes a ellos.	X	1	2	3	4	5
20. Los maestros hacen lo que sea para ayudar a los alumnos a alcanzar sus metas académicas.	X	1	2	3	4	5

Gracias por su colaboración. Provea de cualquier comentario que tenga en la parte de abajo.

Comentarios:

Figure 3. Parent Survey Comments

Survey comments

1. I don't agree with some parts of the 504 plans where students can have the parent or teacher write their homework for them. This does nothing to improve the student's ability to write.
2. Our children are the third generation in our family to go to this school. So far we have had four children go to this school and we have had an excellent experience. We really appreciate all your staff and teachers have done for our family. Thank You!
3. This staff has always been very helpful with any situations I have had a concern about. I feel they go the extra mile for their students and the extended families.
4. In regards to 12 and 18, I wish I could have circled a five. However, my concern for the child in the classroom will not let me do so. I have had a child that I have concerns about. What is the purpose of asking us these questions and wanting parents to communicate with the leaders of the school about our concerns when nothing is done about it? Where is the justification in that?
5. Would like to thank all staff for doing a good job. Keep it up.
6. We are new to the school, so I'm sure some of these are higher. I just don't know.
7. In prior years I have noticed a lot of favoritism shown by some teachers toward some students, causing problems in the classroom, also causing students to experience heightened levels of anxiety. This creates an environment that is not conducive to learning.
8. Complaints need to be taken care of.
9. The administration is very supportive and welcomes each member of our family. We are so fortunate to have our administrator at our school!
10. I think the school needs to do a better job with reaching the non-English speaking families.
11. I am very impressed with, and pleased by the teachers my students have the privilege to be taught by. Their attitude and desire to reach every child and to make sure they progress as well as achieve their individual goals should be commended. Thank You.
12. No comment
13. Overall I believe the school and the staff do an excellent job teaching my child. I have had 2 other children go through this school, with much satisfaction. Heck, I even attended this school. I do however; feel that not all children are held to the same standards. My child is held to them and I agree 100% as he is held to them at home as well. I have only had issues with a teacher in this school during the 10 years my children have gone

there. That is definitely something to be very proud of. Keep up the great service and care for our kids.

14. Our family has had a great experience at this school. We feel very welcome at the school and in classrooms. I have felt that each child is valued and helped to succeed. The entire staff is great – Administrators, Teachers and Secretaries.
15. I am very pleased with my son's progress and his renewed interest in school. My sons experience at his previous school for the past 2 years has left an impression on him that we are trying to reverse. He seems motivated to do his homework, read and do well. He tells me about his conversations with teachers, aides and other faculty. He finally is enjoying music class, which he never liked before. He's slowly becoming the kid who enjoys school. Thanks so much for this gift.
16. This schools staff is the best! My son has gotten a great education not only academically but also just about being a good citizen and friend. My only suggestion is to offer challenging academics to those students who are excelling and achieving high scores. All in all we are extremely pleased with the education our child has received at this school and sad that it is his last year. Thank You.
17. Gracias Por llevar a nuestros hijos hacia el conocimiento.
18. I feel that parents need to be informed about assemblies that take place during the school year. The teachers my child has had has made a great impact on her learning and her love for school. Thank you! Keep up the good work.
19. The no child left behind idea is great. Many kids who need help are getting it, especially at this school. Unfortunately, there is no enrichment program for those students who love to excel in their learning. I would be an avid supporter of the no child left behind if it included those children who are easily bored by leaning the same things repeatedly. These kids are the ones being left behind. There needs to be a greater emphasis on Math and Science at this school, especially in the first years of school. Most children would enjoy hands on type activities that allow their minds to comprehend other learning activities such as reading. Such subjects would be especially interesting to boys, hold their interest, and make school an enjoyable experience. America's children (as well as this school) are lacking in depth of education in these subjects.
20. This school works hard to prepare students for the WASL. I would like to see more teaching and less test prep. Students who are not at risk and are excelling deserve extra attention as well so they don't get bored.
21. Question 19 I feel that in today's society there is hardly any respect for anyone who is different. As a parent I am teaching my son that differences among people are ok. There are all kinds of slang being said among children. I feel they hear this from adults, either in the home or in the environment they are in. My son has been called names on the bus and playground. When he tells me the remarks at home, I cannot believe what I hear. I know it is hard to get adults to see eye to eye, But I just hope something changes.

22. This is a wonderful school. My children's teachers have always been caring, considerate and encouraging. The staff is, collectively, a godsend.
23. I think we lose out on imaginative play, which develops children's brains in many ways that helps kids learn and do well in school. I would like to see more fun physical activities to show that you can exercise while playing – not just jogging or doing workout type things.

Figure 4. Student Survey

Student Survey

This survey relates to climate qualities at this school. Your views are important to help improve this school so that we are really doing what is best for kids. Please respond honestly to each statement below – your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a smile scale, with frown meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and smile meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the straight face when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) Circle one face for each statement.

Please provide some information below:

Gender: Male 29/Female 34
Not Listed: 1

What grade are you in? 4

Your race/ethnicity American Indian/Native American 1
 African American/Black 0
 Asian/Pacific Islander 3
 Hispanic/Latino 8
 White/Caucasian 51
 Multi-racial 1

Main language spoken at home: English 57/ Spanish 4/other 3

*Think about this school as you read each statement below. Then **Circle** the face that best describes how much you agree with that statement.*

How much do you agree with this statement?	I Don't Know	Don't agree at all	I Agree
1. The main purpose of my school is to help students learn.	10	0	54
2. I know why it is important for me to learn what is being taught.	10	0	54
3. My classes challenge me to think and solve problems.	10	4	50
4. Teachers expect all students to work hard.	4	1	59
5. Teachers expect all students to succeed, no matter who they are.	13	6	45

6. Students feel free to express their ideas and opinions.	13	5	46
7. My teachers help me when I don't understand something.	4	0	60
8. Teachers give students extra help if it is needed.	8	3	53
9. My teachers encourage me.	6	1	57
10. Students are given many chances to show what we have learned.	12	3	49
11. Discipline problems are handled fairly.	12	3	49
12. Teachers are constantly trying to become better teachers.	9	0	55
13. The adults in my school work well together.	7	0	57
14. My teacher understands me.	12	4	48
15. The adults in my school show respect for me.	10	1	53
16. Students respect those who are different from them.	15	8	41
17. The teachers and other adults in my school show respect for each other.	7	0	57
18. I feel safe when I am at school.	3	3	58
19. The adults who work at my school care about all students, not just a few.	2	0	62
20. My teachers will contact my family if I am having problems learning.	17	3	44

Thank you for your input. Provide any comments you have below or attach them to this survey.

Figure 5. Staff Survey

Staff Survey

This survey relates to climate qualities at this elementary school. Your views are important to help improve this school so that we are really doing what is best for kids. Please respond honestly to each statement below – your responses will remain confidential.

This survey should take you about 10 minutes to complete. It uses a 5-point scale, with 1 meaning you “don’t agree at all” with the statement, and 5 meaning you “agree completely.” (Use the X when you don’t know or the statement does not apply.) **Mark the top numbers for each statement that you feel the building puts its importance and use the bottom number for how you feel the ranking is for you.**

Please provide some information below:

Gender: Male 1/Female 10
Not Listed: 3

Your race/ethnicity

American Indian/Native American 0
African American/Black 0
Asian/Pacific Islander 0
Hispanic/Latino 1
White/Caucasian 13
Multi-racial 0

Years of experience in public education: 0-5 – 2
6-10 – 2
11-15 – 2
16-20 – 1
21- 25 – 1
25-30 – 5
31 plus - 1

What positions have you held while at this school: Volunteer, Para, Support Staff,
Teacher, Other (please list)
Teacher – 11
Counselor – 1
Secretary - 2

Think about this school as you read each statement below. Then **Circle** the number(s) that best describes how much you agree with that statement.

How much do you agree with this statement?	NA	Don't agree at all	Agree slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree mostly	Agree completely
1. The school has a clear sense of purpose.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 2	9 6	4 4
2. I have a clear understanding of what the school is trying to achieve.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 3	7 4	6 5
3. The staff shares a common understanding of what the school wants to achieve.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 1	7 6	6 5
4. All staff is committed to achieving the school's goals.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 2	7 4	6 6
5. The staff keeps the school's goals in mind when making important decisions.	0 2	0 0	0 1	2 1	7 6	5 4
6. The school's primary emphasis is improving student learning.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 1	5 3	9 8
7. The school uses a system to obtain a variety of perspectives when making decisions.	0 2	0 0	1 1	2 2	8 7	3 2
8. Teachers discuss teaching issues on a regular basis.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 0	4 7	9 5
9. Staff members work together to solve problems related to school issues.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 2	4 4	9 6

10. The staff works in teams across grade levels to help increase student learning.	0 3	0 0	1 1	2 2	3 2	8 6
11. Staff routinely works together to plan what will be taught.	0 3	0 0	1 1	3 3	3 3	7 4
12. Teachers have frequent communication with the families of their students.	0 2	0 0	0 0	4 2	7 7	4 3
13. Staff members trust one another.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 0	6 8	7 4
14. Professional development activities are consistent with school goals.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	9 9	5 3
15. I have enough opportunities to grow professionally.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 1	4 2	10 9
16. Different staff members periodically lead professional development activities for other staff.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 2	7 5	7 5
17. The school environment is conducive to learning.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 2	1 1	13 9
18. I feel safe when I am at school.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	7 1	7 11
19. The adults who work at my school care about all students, not just a few.	0 2	0 0	0 0	0 0	2 2	12 10

20. The school provides ample information to families about how to help students succeed in school.	0 2	0 0	0 0	1 3	9 6	4 3
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Thank you for your input. Provide any comments you have below or attach them to this survey.