

Principal-Teacher Relationships and Making a  
Stronger School Environment

by

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Stronger School Environment

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## **Abstract**

Public education depends on the collaboration of adults to promote the success of the students who are served. Principal-teacher relationships are a necessary part of the overall learning environment established for students to grow and thrive. In an urban educational setting these relationships can be tested, especially in the transitional grades typically associated with middle schools. Principals are finding that they must consider the relationships with teachers through the lens of academics and physical and emotional safety. This study was conducted to contribute to the present body of literature on educational leadership and adult relationships in the educational setting. The three research questions examine the elements of strong principal-teacher relationships, the characteristics within a school to make a strong learning environment through physical, emotional, and academic safety, and any association between the quality of principal-teacher relationships, safety, and learning. Utilizing Q-methodology, urban principals and teachers from Northeast Ohio completed a Q-sort and open response survey. Q-methodology allowed for value to be placed upon statements to relate leadership qualities, safety, and relationships. Results and implications center around expectations for both principals and teachers, and that safety needs to be considered beyond the typical physical safety characteristics.

*Keywords:* principal, leadership, safety, relationships

## **Dedication**

Without the love and support of my wife Grace, this journey would not have been possible. I dedicate this work primarily to you. While this project of mine was not on our list of things to accomplish, your continued love and support ensured that I would continue to learn through the process. You supported me because you see my needs more clearly than I see them myself. I love you and know that we will face new challenges in our continued growth and pursuit of a life of happiness.

My children, Evelyn, Delilah, Simon, and Shepherd deserve mention as they continue to inspire me each and every day. Their continued growth is a magic I intend to watch for my lifetime. I hope one day, when they are all older, they will look upon the work of their parents and see a purpose that extends beyond the walls of our home.

I would have liked my father, Ron, to have had the opportunity to critique my work. Unfortunately, his passing in the spring of 2021 was the final kick I needed to pursue this next step in my personal and professional development. Dad instilled in me a work ethic that has yielded great reward in my life.

Outside of my family there are friends and colleagues who have challenged me to be better. To my mentor, Michelle Kearns, I will continue to utilize your training and friendship in continued growth and professional exploration. I hope to not let you down. To my work wife, now retired school counselor extraordinaire, Judy Maver, thank you for always challenging me and poking me to speak up. For my current administrative

team, you have endured the tests of battle and continue to stand by my side to do whatever it takes for our students, I will always be grateful.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

You are walking down the hallway on the first day as a principal in a new building, and even though you received this placement at the last minute you are full of enthusiasm, excitement, and ready to lead your staff toward huge academic gains. As you move through the halls to greet staff prior to students arriving you quickly notice that many staff appear to withdraw or find ways to avoid engaging with you. This occurs at such a high rate that you begin to wonder how the climate of your new building could possibly be stacked against you. What actions by previous leadership caused such a rift between teachers and the principal? Could this be a contributing factor to the concerns around student performance? If staff do not feel safe interacting in their professional capacity with school leadership how must the students feel? You quickly realize that you need to gather more information and begin to utilize the best leadership practices to impact the overall school climate.

School leadership includes principals and other leaders who work to cultivate the necessary conditions to maintain the goal of education by building the minds and talents of tomorrow. These conditions include the attributes required to ensure a safe learning environment in terms of academics, physical conditions, and emotional support. All stakeholders, including students and staff, play a role in promoting school safety in order to shape the school culture and environment.

The school environment has been studied and includes climate, culture, emotions, experience, and the overall relationships within an educational organization (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). Characteristics in the organization include values, beliefs, and attitudes in the environment and the potential outcomes of work (Tonich, 2021). Improving and

developing positive environmental aspects is essential to increasing student performance outcomes, which is one of the most important measures for schools (Tonich, 2021).

When planning for school improvements leaders must consider the role of the attitude about culture and environmental impact to bring positive changes (Harris, 2018).

Transformational leadership works to develop staff motivation and self-efficacy (Menon & Lefteri, 2021). These leaders establish a clear vision with alignment to ensure personal goal setting, reflection, and self-efficacy (Menon & Lefteri, 2021). The setting of personal goals aligned with the vision is supported and strengthened by building effective relationships (Lee & Kuo, 2018).

Physical safety is a typical consideration for schools. Physical safety examines hallways, procedures, emergency drills, and other aspects that directly impact the security of a campus (Croft et al., 2019). Schools also examine and employ strategies to address emotional and academic safety (Wang & Degol, 2016). Physical, emotional, and academic aspects speak about the safety needs of the student as a whole. Schools implement safety and security protocols to guard against violent incidents. Social emotional learning (SEL) addresses the emotional stress and triggers from students' experiences. Academic safety seeks to provide adequate support to ensure student growth and completion of school requirements necessary for graduation.

The school environment is a shared experience by anyone who steps on campus. All stakeholders need leadership to drive positive outcomes to shape the environment, to maintain safety, and to provide support to ensure positive student outcomes. The current investigation intends to determine if effective leadership is necessary to establish and

maintain a positive school climate, which is imperative for a safe learning environment addressing the whole student.

### **Problem Statement**

There are many conditions to be met for student success in schools. Oftentimes school success may appear to be solely an academic concern. Student success can be measured by achievement and reported by state report cards. However, there are many factors that impact student achievement. School safety and the school environment contribute to student attendance and student performance outcomes (Croft et al., 2019; Rajan, 2021). Thirty-five percent of parents polled have concerns about their children's overall safety in the school environment (Croft et al., 2019). In addition, 25% of parents indicate that their children self-report concerns about their safety in the school environment (Croft et al., 2019). Emotional security and responses to external experiences contribute to the sense of safety and well-being of students in the school environment (Rajan, 2021). Academic needs are addressed using specific policy and implemented by school leaders in which certain teaching methods are practiced. These methods are intended to close gaps and meet the specific learning needs of all students; however, it is questionable as to whether or not these methods address the needs of the whole child.

With the goal of increasing student achievement, all factors that impact student achievement must be addressed. Achievement is the official end game or measure in education. Still, many professionals outline their philosophy of education around the developments of the whole student and work to create opportunities to grow students in academic and nonacademic ways (Wang & Degol, 2016). If safe learning environments

are not addressed school and district report cards will not improve, and students will continue to suffer. Safety in academic progress, the physical environment, and social-emotional development build a school setting that welcomes students and their participation.

There is some understanding of how a leader's relationship with teachers, staff morale and motivation is interconnected. Pinkas and Bulić (2017) correlate transformational leadership with setting high expectations and establishing a clear vision to promote increases in morale and motivation. However, gaps exist in how school leadership addresses safety and builds an environment leading to student success. Success is measured by more than academic scores; it can be measured by feelings of acceptance, purpose, and elements of continued growth.

### **Purpose Statement**

The current investigation aims to determine if leadership drives the school climate when establishing a safe learning environment that addresses the needs of the whole student. Data will be collected using a staff questionnaire and interviews. Collecting data around the specific perceptions of teachers and principals regarding safety, leadership, and climate indicators will be necessary. Staff interpretations of their school environment will be compared with examining leadership practices to establish and maintain the climate. These sets of collected adult data can be compared to the student environment surveys to determine trends and establish best practices to impact the climate and the outcomes for students.

### **Research Questions**

Considering the problem and the purpose of this research, it is necessary to address the most impactful elements of leadership and characteristics of safety that are necessary for a stronger school environment. To this end, information was gathered to better understand the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of strong, positive principal-teacher relationships based on the perceptions of administrators and teachers?
2. What characteristics of the school environment make for a stronger learning environment?
  - a. What elements make for a physically safe environment for students?
  - b. What elements make for an emotionally safe environment for students?
  - c. What elements make for an academically safe environment for students?
3. Is there an association between the reported quality of these relationships, safety, and/or student learning?

### **Research Design**

The target population for this study is teachers and administrators from urban schools in northeast Ohio. The study will be conducted after at least nine weeks of regular instruction in the given school year to allow for leadership structures to take root and set expectations of both students and staff. This will also allow for various groups of principals and teacher leaders to interact when developing systems of improvements to impact the climate of the building while working to address student achievement.

The current study will capitalize on a mixed methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. The goal of using a mixed methods approach is to examine both scaled ratings and extended responses from participants via a

single collection tool. Statistical analyses of the scaled ratings and the patterns and trends found in the extended responses will be compared when examining outcomes and potential next steps based upon this study.

Utilizing Q-methodology, adult perspectives will be examined to determine patterns and trends related to the principal-teacher relationship and the school climate. Q-methodology examines the data through a lens to quantify subjectivity (Watts & Stenner, 2012). While student academic outcomes can be measured by widely accepted fixed means, quality of leadership, school climate, and safety can have fixed measure attributes as well as opinions based upon viewpoints and perceptions.

### **Significance of Study**

This study seeks to collect data on the relationship between teachers and administrators and the impact those relationships have on the school environment as it relates to the potential for student success. Student success is essential for academic growth and sets the expectations for lifelong learning while competing in a global environment after high school. Examining the teacher-administration relationship and its impact on the school environment will provide suggested next steps to improve conditions and impact student outcomes.

Understanding the teacher-administrator relationship will directly impact the functionality of schools as they work to adjust and improve the learning environment and student outcomes. The knowledge collected from the current investigation will further work to help teachers and administrators set goals to refine their collective and personal practices related to the school environment. Students and teachers will yield indirect benefits from this study, as the determined adjustments between administrators and

teachers will impact school and classroom practices. These practice changes will allow conditions to be better aligned for student success. The outcome data will determine significant areas of focus for those pursuing opportunities as a building based school administrator. The topics of focus will provide foundational targets for constructing and maintaining the essential principal-teacher relationship to foster positive school culture and provide for student growth. Finally, this study will improve practicing school administrators to consider the multiple perspectives of various stakeholders on establishing and maintaining a positive school environment and addressing the needs of the whole child.

By examining the relationship between teachers and administrators regarding environment, safety, and student growth, the current study will add to the body of knowledge related to school leadership. Research exists to describe leadership characteristics, school environment, and school safety; however, the research on the intersection of these ideas has gaps due to the extensive possibility of variables. This study will serve to contribute to the collection of information about learning environments.

### **Assumptions**

There are several assumptions related to the current study. Firstly, the target sample group fits the description of being a teacher or principal who serves grades six through nine in the urban setting. These positions hold licensure in the state of Ohio and follow standards of practice, ethical practices and the guidelines set forth by the Ohio Department of Education. In addition, these individuals who will make up the sample set



are currently in their active roles in education and not reflecting on distant practice or the practice of others.

There is the assumption that the terms school climate and school culture are used interchangeably by many members of education. This study will work to define these terms as components of the educational environment. There is also the idea that the educational environment experienced by staff members overlaps with the environment experienced by students.

Leadership is a quality that can be demonstrated by multiple levels of an organization. One does not have to be the organizational head or manager in order to demonstrate leadership qualities. There is some form of leadership in schools that is typically associated with the established positions in the building which follow expectations as set forth by position description. Principals serve in the current education system as leaders over the essential elements and human capital in their building with measured outcomes based on student performance.

Any collective data related to overall school or grade level academic performance will be derived from the state reported growth and proficiency measures for the appropriate grade level. Each school participates in the application of Ohio State Tests. The data from these tests will be publicly made data which has accounted for enrollment and other considerations for alignment of student score awarding.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations related to this study. The definition of climate and the relationship between climate, culture, and environment utilized by the researcher are taken from literature and experience. This study is focused upon transitional grade levels

five through nine. Depending upon the utilized definitions and structures within a school system, the defined culture and grade of transition may vary by simple structure. While the goal to embrace a wide understanding of climate and transitional grades seeks to provide possible information to a larger audience, this study is limited by the scope of the participants included.

### **Definitions of Terms**

There are several characteristics and constructs discussed throughout the current study. School environment, safety, and leadership are defined here in addition to other terms which require a common definition of understanding. These definitions are the understanding of the well-defined topics in current literature.

- *Climate*: In some research climate is interchanged with culture; however, climate specifically is the unseen interactions between individuals based upon their emotions and experiences (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017).
- *Culture*: While used in some research interchangeably with climate, culture is depicted by the values, beliefs, and attitudes that drive the system of actions and behavior in a school (Tonich, 2021).
- *Safety*: For schools, safety can apply to physical, emotional, or academic characteristics within the school environment (Croft et al., 2019). These characteristics include academic distress or failure, social-emotional learning, and conditions related to potential physical harm.
- *School Environment*: The environment within schools is the result of the interactions between the students, faculty, and staff. This collection of individuals

interacts within layers of emotions, social relationships, and their academic work (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017).

- *School Leadership*: Those who lead within a school based upon position or personal characteristics (Pont, 2020).
- *Staff Relationships*: This is the view of interactions and behaviors towards others. These interactions occur between leaders, staff, and students in any combination.
- *Transformational Leadership*: Leadership and culture that capitalize on motivation to bring about change (Ciftgul & Cetinkanat, 2021). In education this leadership style utilizes a clear vision to promote positive outcomes by developing teachers to higher levels of performance. There are systems developed to allow for cooperation on all levels with an active voice and a sense of increased morale.

### **Summary**

This dissertation will work to gather evidence related to the research questions posed in Chapter One. Chapter Two seeks to examine the current or most relevant research as related to the components of the research questions, which include school climate, multiple viewpoints of school safety, and school leadership. Methodology and data collection protocol will be outlined in Chapter Three. After assembling the information collected from employed methods, Chapter Four will analyze the findings and organize patterns and trends. Chapter Five will provide a summary of all findings, offer discussion on implications, and provide recommendations for future practice and potential study.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

There are many contributing factors to a successful institution of education. Many parents or stakeholders of any school will argue that the teacher is the primary factor in determining the success of a student. It is known in education that the teacher is one of the many integral parts of an extremely complex machine working tirelessly to reach the needs of students and provide for tomorrow. Safety is of paramount importance for any institution dealing with children and is more than locking doors or simply examining physical aspects. Schools examine and provide safety in emotional and academic areas (Croft et al., 2019; Wang & Degol, 2016). A positive school climate is shaped by leadership providing and promoting a safe learning environment addressing the needs of the whole student (Prothero, 2021).

A consideration to address the connection between safety, leadership, and the overall culture is to determine how these essential functions work together. Kingston et al. (2018) examines the necessary structures to develop a comprehensive method to address school safety. In this comprehensive approach, Kingston et al. explains that an intentional examination of readiness can identify structures to promote and strengthen necessary components related to leadership, safety, and campus culture.

Firstly, it can be argued that the impact on staff differs from the impact on students. Taking the approach that the ultimate product of a K-12 institution of education is student achievement, this review seeks to examine the foundational elements of culture as they impact the overall environment, instruction, and student achievement. Many professional development practices and methods link the notion of ‘climate’ and ‘culture’ together when addressing the human component of the school environment. Research in

this review addresses both the climate and the culture pertaining to the school environment, the relationship with safety, and the impact of leadership.

### **School Climate**

Pinkas and Bulić (2017) define school climate as “the invisible dimension of school life, which is the result of the overall relationships of all its employees and students, and each of them experiences subjectively, at the level of one's own emotions, social relations and work environment” (p. 436). Climate in school buildings has many attributes, but the most important is the actions and beliefs of all the individuals that make up the collective (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). It may be questioned how a school leader makes a direct impact on specific student outcomes; however, leaders have the power to form and build a positive school climate (Harris, 2018).

Tonich (2021) states, “Organizational culture represents the model of norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes that direct organizational behavior” (p. 52). Tonich goes on to examine the principal as a practice and determines that through improving managerial skills the organizational culture of the school improves. Furthermore, with improved culture comes higher student products or outcomes (Lambersky, 2016; Tonich, 2021). Tonich states that the principal is much like a lead teacher who is selected based on a multitude of characteristics designed to fulfill the need of competent educational leadership toward an increase of student achievement. Furthermore, Tonich illustrates that school leadership is not only focused on managerial tasks, but also focused on the leadership and working efforts to connect culture and safety with leadership.

Organizational norms can include structural practices and leadership qualities. Establishing and maintaining a respect for the professionalism and capacity of teachers and communicating a clear vision have been found to increase the collective efficacy of

staff and increase a sense of community and culture (Lambersky, 2016). Relationships as a norm between students and teachers, teachers and other staff, and school and community are an essential foundation for a positive school climate (Prothero, 2021). Relationships cover more than basic social interactions; students want to know and feel that teachers are invested in their success (Prothero, 2021). In a study conducted by Prothero, data showed that meaningful established relationships were a clear indicator for increases in participation and engagement of families and caregivers. High expectations and consistency are important not only for academics, but also for behaviors (Prothero, 2021). Prothero continues that having norms and established expectations around behaviors and academics must be supported by intentional resources. By providing support as the standard for all students, clear communication about changes brought on by regular reflection have a positive impact on student and stakeholder involvement.

Student aspirations and attitudes are an aspect of a school culture. Almroth et al. (2021) found that the attitude around student success and aspirations to attend college were related to how well staff rated the school culture. In cases where staff reported a positive climate there was an increase in the number of students who maintained positive attitudes and aspirations of post-secondary education (Almroth et al., 2021; Wang & Degol, 2016).

Harris (2018) examines how attitude about culture derived from leadership talk is an important consideration for school improvement. The attitudes, goals, and actions of school leadership can be extrapolated from examining the discussions that school leadership engages in and either supports or suppresses the school culture. Shared

attitudes expressed through leadership talk or discussion can impact the direction of school culture and overall student achievement (Anderson, 2017; Harris, 2018).

Another characteristic of culture is beliefs. Principals may not have the ability to determine staff beliefs; however, they may be able to have an influence. Muhammad (2009) speaks of school culture and the beliefs of staff. Specifically, the cultural belief that all children can learn. While it is important for administration to influence staff to have the belief that all children are capable of learning, administration also needs to ensure that building resources are aligned with the idea (Woodcock, 2021). It is the beliefs held by teachers that influence the way in which they perceive their students and the decision-making process (Atilas et al., 2017). There are several traits that can be considered negative beliefs, such as lack of belief in students potential, or that student success is solely dependent upon a student's current state of mind (Muhammad, 2009). It is here where leadership impact can serve to align the goals of all stakeholders and have a measured impact.

Mood and emotions impact the climate or perception of climate. Depending on the style of leadership, the acknowledgement of mood and emotions can be leveraged to have a positive or negative impact on climate. Understanding emotions and moods and short and long-term feelings can impact the most effective leadership style to make the educational environment successful for staff (Ginsberg, 2020).

Motivation does play a role in the perceived culture of a building and the student outcomes. Agarwal and Mukherjee (2020) concluded a relationship between academic leadership, motivations of teachers, and the effectiveness of student outcomes. In terms of the culture, specifically student attitudes, the compass of success is driven by the

school leadership and the attitudes they portray. These attitudes are often the result of interactions with leadership, students, and internal motivators (Agarwal & Mukherjee, 2020; Harris, 2018).

Relationships greatly impact the overall environment and can be the footing for progress in increasing culture and performance outcomes. Gordon (2017) examines how the positive nature of leadership has potential to sharpen a culture and help an organization reach its goals. In many cases, positive leadership starts with a positive culture and the simplest aspects of respect and love. Gordon states, “great leaders also know and love their people, if you want to build a great team, business, family, school or organization, love the people you lead and work with” (p. 103).

While looking at climate and culture of staff several studies examined the human component and at times are specific to label the psychological impact on teachers. The culture of a building as previously expressed can be related to the perceptions, emotions, and attitudes of adults in the building. Suleman et al. (2021) directly studied leadership attributes such as coaching, information dissemination, delegation, accountability, self-direction, and skill development that comprise empowered leadership and their impact on the overall health of the teachers. For example, “Leadership empowering behavior predicts teachers’ psychological well-being. It shows that when leaders empower their subordinates, then the subordinates will be feeling satisfaction psychologically...” (Suleman et al., 2021, p. 19). There was an intense sense of ownership by staff when teachers were led in a manner that allowed for collaboration, self-direction, and a powerful sense of coaching.



Wang and Degol (2016) discuss the sense of community within school climate, where connectedness is necessary for students to have a sense of acceptance within a school culture to promote an increase of performance. The growth of relationships between all stakeholders and particularly teachers and staff, and the manner in which teachers collaborate and provide support to one another is a necessary collaboration (Wang & Degol, 2016). Wang and Degol were able to conclude that “students are more likely to respect and conform to the classroom rules when teachers, students, and administrators value and support one another and have warm and caring relationships” (p. 330).

Thinking about the overall health of staff, Thiers (2020) brings up the notion of the social aspects of staff. Considering this focus on morale and workplace health, Thiers followed a team of teachers who worked as teacher leaders to provide and promote social functions and interactions for staff. This development included the perceived sense of belonging and overall staff comradery; staff comradery can be developed by building relationships and by viewing colleagues as individuals separate of the workplace. The implications of the ‘human’ aspect of a staff has many layers. Therefore, establishing a balance of school based social interactions could help to build overall team health. Leadership implications for both teacher leaders and administrators will help this fit into a larger view of morale.

Understanding the perception of morale and the leadership impact on morale requires a common definition. Zhao et al. (2021) framed job morale around these three areas:

1. Willingness to work: employees with interests in work, will to work, and job involvement;
2. Organizational Commitment: organizational identity and willingness to make efforts; and
3. Group Spirit: employees with status cognition, group service, social culture, and pride of group relationship. (p. 49)

The components of staff morale are more than just a simple attitude. Examining the components demonstrate that many aspects of the environment can have an impact, specifically the style and type of leadership utilized.

Morale and culture can be impacted by much more than only the managerial style of principals, including cohesiveness, communication and problem-solving (Wang & Degol, 2016). Every action by building leadership can have a different impact from complex to simple daily functions. Items such as principals being visible to students and staff, sharing a clear vision, providing support when dealing with parents, acknowledging work and accomplishments, and encouraging for the future have significant impact on both students and staff (Lambersky, 2016). Many of these items can be overlooked if not asked about directly when collecting data about staff morale. All these attributes can be tied to specific leadership strategies (Lambersky, 2016). Leadership and relationship building also reflects the emotions of the leader, as the campus leader is the one person who all staff and students look to when taking direction (Ginsberg, 2020).

The impact of positive culture can only help drive the outcomes of schools. When summarizing the impact of culture Gordon (2017) states, “culture not only beats strategy, but it also fuels it and drives people and organizations to record growth and performance”

(p. 19). Examples explored by Gordon include examining the shifts in practice, culture, and vision at Clemson University by Coach Dabo Swinney as well as by examining ways in which Rick Hendrick, a moto-sports extraordinaire and businessman, capitalized on leadership through culture to build a thriving business. It is important to see the varying methods of applying leadership strategies and principles in different environments, such as business and education.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership describes a style and theory of leadership phrased by James MacGregor Burns that transforms the beliefs, actions, and behaviors of followers to be motivated to increased levels of achievement and excellence (Anderson, 2017). This style and theory of leadership is appealing in many contexts with the aspect of motivating employees and followers to high performance through intrinsic properties. The world of education examined how this work could benefit the students through application to the educators themselves. Bernard Bass's early work brought transformational leadership into the classroom with an application on daily interactions and coaching and feedback to provide for individualized personal professional growth for teachers (Anderson, 2017). Following Bass, Kenneth Leithwood's research on transformational leadership in schools linked the potential for transformation practices as part of principal preparation as a direct impact on encouraging staff creativity and development and having the power to impact school climate (Anderson, 2017).

The building leader is considered the school administrator. Administrators can be characterized as a building or campus principal, an assistant principal, or a dean. School building leaders are responsible for the care and custody of all aspects of the school. This

includes physical resources, human resources, students, families, various stakeholders, budgets, and strategic planning for ongoing improvement and development. Leadership and culture have been significantly related to one another as leaders' relationship building skills are essential in the growth and development of campus culture and shared vision (Anderson, 2017; Ciftgul & Cetinkanat, 2021; Lee & Kuo, 2018).

Examining leadership qualities, specifically transformational leadership in education, requires examination of the organizational culture, norms and relationship, and the perceptions of staff (Ciftgul & Cetinkanat, 2021; Lee & Kuo, 2018). It makes sense to collect data from the leaders themselves; however, educators provide a unique perspective on the leadership where they work (Ciftgul & Cetinkanat, 2021).

Transformational leadership in schools has been studied for decades. The focus of the research, the outcomes, and the working parts have shifted over the years. Anderson (2017) states that the overall purpose of transformational leadership characteristics is to have the greatest influence on various working parts of the school, especially the staff culture, climate, and performance.

Transformational leadership is described as creating a clear purpose and direction by supporting and building a sense of collaboration through effective relationships (Lambersky, 2016; Lee & Kuo, 2018). This form of leadership capitalizes on leading with emotional support to contribute to student success (Lambersky, 2016). It is this connection between emotional needs, effective relationships, and the impact on school climate and student success that leads to the focus in the literature review.

### ***Characteristics***

Many of the impacts and studies of transformational leadership involve a change of some type. This change includes professional development structure, school structure, leadership, culture, viewpoint standards and norms or other attributes that have an impact on the product of student achievement (Anderson, 2017; Lee & Kuo, 2018).

Transformational leadership is an individual or group practice that capitalizes on developing the motivation and self-efficacy of team members (Menon & Lefteri, 2021). Menon and Lefteri state that transformational leadership cultivates intellectual creativity, promotes focused behaviors aligned with the overall vision, motivates, and causes intentional reflection and accountability. These attributes have been found to increase trust in leadership, promote high levels of self-efficacy, and provide clear and positive motivation (Menon & Lefteri, 2021).

Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Pinkas and Bulić (2017) examined four comparison values to gather information to rate the quality of leadership attributes of transformational leaders, instructional innovation, student relations, resources, and collaboration. Pinkas and Bulić concluded that essential characteristics of effective leadership include conveying values, ethical decision making, goal setting, and a focus on growth. The significance of these attributes increases in staff seeking opportunities for personal development, collaborative goal setting, and utilization of feedback to drive student achievement (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017; Tan, 2018).

A characteristic of leadership that develops over time based upon specific experiences and cognitive developments is ethics (Bass et al., 2018). The overall philosophy of a school leader must exist beyond the rule of law, application of board policy and procedure, and computational processing. These primary functions of policy

implementation and procedures are necessary for effective leadership development, but the incorporation of values and morals impact the qualities of a leader. This incorporation brings a varying degree and necessary application of ethical processing to school leaders decision making and process management (Bass et al., 2018). Klenowski and Ehrich (2016) contend that there is a need for school leaders to develop and apply intentional ethical practices, especially in the current environment of high stakes testing and accountability. These ethical practices need to be developed to understand current policies and practices and ensure that resources are utilized in an equitable framework; therefore, providing for a positive and consistent school culture. Klenowski and Ehrich (2016) frame their work in a way to allow inquiry to drive school leader professional practices with the goal of empowering a lasting effect. Overall, Klenowski and Ehrich conclude that leadership practices must understand the values and beliefs that drive the leaders and that courageous and intentional conversations around practice are essential for equitable outcomes via an ethical lens. With a focus on both the results and the ways in which principals lead in that direction principals can demonstrate the leadership quality of inclusion (Wang & Degol, 2016). Inclusive practices of leaders and leadership teams are related to feeling connected; when directly focused upon these practices can bring increases in school culture through building a sense of community (Wang & Degol, 2016).

Lassiter (2017) explains how courage is a necessary attribute for school leaders looking to effect change. Courage empowers leaders to be able to step up and act. Lassiter explains that courage is more than a one-dimensional phrase. School leaders must develop and explore intellectual, disciplined, and empathetic courage as they

address the daily function and process of leading a school (Lassiter, 2017). Lassiter ties the ideals around these various frames of courage to the governing principal and school leadership standards. This focus on courage further supports accountability, personal development, school development, and leadership team development, as courageous exploration allows for deeper reflective practices (Gordon, 2017; Lassiter, 2017). Direct, critical, and courageous discussions lead to increased personal reflection and increases in overall efficacy (Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Lassiter, 2017).

### *Effects on Adults*

Transformational leaders serve as a model and guide for the members of a group by conveying strengths, understanding needs, and aligning the work to best drive the change to address those needs (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). There is a set of high expectations aligned with the vision for the campus and this serves to both act as a motivator and driving force for increased morale (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017; Tan, 2018).

Lambersky (2016) found that school leadership needs to be conscious of the humanity of those staff being led and the student products. Synthesizing feedback from teachers, Lambersky found that qualities of order keeping, empathy for teachers, and being present not only impacted the school culture, but also provided clear communication of vision and collaboration. Lambersky supports “the importance of school principals understanding the influence of the emotional dimension of their leadership behaviors” (p. 401). Overall, Lambersky suggests that the emotional dimensions of leadership are related to positive school culture and increases in student engagement.

Positive leadership yields positive outcomes; however, taking on a leadership role may elicit feelings of anxiety or fear for those leading. Kelley and Kelley (2013) explain the need to transition from fear to courage for effective leadership. Kelley and Kelley outline the need to design systems and leadership for courage and to address the reality of failure as part of the transformation process. Leadership must exercise the same courageous practices they expect from teachers and staff. Leaders have to instill and capitalize on the courage of those they lead by identifying attributes of courage just as any other necessary skill (Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Lassiter, 2017).

### ***Effects on Students***

When examining the effects of leadership on student achievement, Tan (2018) found that principals impacted growth in student achievement. For example, teachers were allowed to work, develop independently, and experience and impact morale within their work and environment (Tan, 2018). Tan explored how this relationship could exist but noted that this outcome only appeared significant for “privileged” students. The same findings were not as significant for “disadvantaged” students (Tan, 2018). One should consider the data and evidence of systems and resources in place for various student subgroups in relation to their achievement.

The use of evidence and the ability to correctly understand data are essential as effective leadership practices (Robinson & Gray, 2019; Tan, 2018). This effective leadership practice held high significance as an impact on student performance outcomes for math achievement (Robinson & Gray, 2019). It was not solely the structure and procedures implemented that achieved high outcomes, it was the use and application of data (Robinson & Gray, 2019). While leadership must excel in this area of data use and



application, a culture of trust in both the data and necessary criticism to cause growth is needed to reach increases in student achievement (Robinson & Gray, 2019).

Transformational leadership contributes to higher levels of teacher morale, satisfaction, and commitment (Anderson, 2017). It is this commitment that directly leads to increases in teacher efficacy and influences increases in student achievement and overall school rating performance (Agarwal & Mukherjee, 2020; Anderson, 2017). Anderson stated that transformational leaders can impact improvement regarding efficacy and teacher self-driven personal instruction. Furthermore, Anderson contends that changes in teacher practice and classroom management that are facilitated by transformational leaders indirectly have a positive impact on student achievement.

### *Effects on Climate*

The impact of leadership on climate varies depending on the specific educational institution and the level of that educational institution (Ciftgul & Cetinkanat, 2021). Leadership styles and attributes have a direct correlation to cultural perceptions. Ciftgul and Cetinkanat found that the leadership attributes of school leaders impact and predict how teachers perceive the culture of the organization overall. Transformational leaders build a climate that allows teachers to problem solve and act on their own ideas (Anderson, 2017; Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). The climate under a transformation leader encourages creativity, increases collaboration, and focuses on continuous improvement for the individual teacher and school (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017).

Lee and Kuo (2018) found that after determining specific leadership aspects, those teachers who reported positive leadership qualities demonstrated by transformational leadership in their building also reported positive feelings of motivation.

These leadership qualities focused on relationships, attitudes, and values (Lee & Kuo, 2018). Lee and Kuo also determined additional significant qualities of leadership including motivation and forms of self-evaluation. Studies explored in this review including Bass and Avolio (1994) and Angelides (2011) utilize various questionnaires and self-assessment tools to collect data; these tools utilize input from both leadership and teachers to identify leadership qualities yielding increases in output and positive culture. Lee and Kuo found that positive leadership qualities positively impacted self-assessment, concluding the influence of positive leadership on culture, climate, and the quality/number of usable responses to questions on the topic.

### **Safety**

Examining school safety can be broken into three areas: physical safety, emotional safety, and academic safety. These three areas cover all the most basic needs of a student in the school environment. For the purposes of this literature review physical safety refers to the physical aspects of the school building including, but not limited to, physical access, violence, and safety measures and planning. Emotional safety speaks directly to the social-emotional supports afforded to students. Academic safety focuses specifically on continued student growth through the use of intentional resources and support, as demonstrated by increases in academic indicators and benchmarks.

Croft et al. (2019) states, “safety is essential to student well-being and success” (p. 1). School violence and psychological needs are two areas that impact academics and student performance (Croft et al., 2019). School violence can be addressed by physical safety structures and practices. Psychological needs can be addressed by emotional safety and social-emotional learning (SEL). The impacts on academics cover a third area of

safety called academic safety, where tools are implemented to support on track academic performance and academic growth. Fifty-seven percent of teens have concerns about a violent school incident involving firearms, and 23% indicated that concerns around all aspects of school safety “negatively affect their ability to learn” (Croft et al., 2019, p. 1). Lamoreaux and Sulkowski (2020) reviewed research and concluded that “efforts to make schools safer and more secure must also consider ways to create a school climate that is comfortable, healthy and supportive of mental health” (p. 158). The development of this positive school climate can be facilitated by effective campus leadership to provide a safe learning environment through addressing physical, emotional, and academic needs.

### ***Physical Safety***

Physical safety in schools has grown as a primary concern for families of school aged children in the United States. Thirty-five percent of families have great concerns about physical safety, and these concerns have been steadily increasing over the past decade (Croft et al., 2019). The practices and implementation strategies of physical safety are monitored and structured and supported across the county via state legislators looking to support the needs of education (Croft et al., 2019). As of February 2019, over 650 bills or resolutions, often involving the use of security or police, mental health needs, and training for school personnel, had been introduced nationwide (Croft et al., 2019). In Ohio, for example, the Ohio Department of Education utilizes the Ohio Safety Center website that outlines and explains current legislation that directs policy and procedure for schools and districts on school safety (Ohio School Safety Center, n.d.).

Students can identify current structures in place for physical safety (Croft et al., 2019). Cameras, emergency plans, security staff, and planning are identified as existing

systems in most students served by American College Test also known as ACT (Croft et al., 2019). Physical safety expands to more than just security measures. Rules and other aspects of being physically present are categorized as physical safety. School appearance, hallway traffic, noise levels, and a sense of belonging are used to describe the sense of physical safety (Williams et al., 2018). Williams et al. continues that the school improvement action of addressing physical safety leads to best practice in addressing the needs of the whole student. Providing for and promoting appropriate personal development physically, emotionally, and socially all contribute to an increase in the sense of physical safety (Williams et al., 2018).

### ***Emotional Safety***

Emotional safety covers more than the expressed emotions of an individual (Hawkes, 2021; Rajan, 2021). Violent experiences impact children in schools directly and indirectly (Rajan, 2021). It is necessary to look beyond the historically stereotypical areas of emotional concerns relating directly to neglect or mistreatment (Rajan, 2021). Students face trauma in several ways at home, at school, and in the community. As districts work to address emotional safety, violence prevention such as intentional social emotional learning courses and student skills developed for coping and tools for trauma, such as teacher interventions and counseling, are increasingly important (Rajan, 2021). Cuellar and Mason (2019) found that climate and socio-economic status of the community contributed to strategies and tools utilized, such as placing social workers, to effectively plan for emotional safety within a school.

Emotional safety can be best observed and addressed in areas of direct contact, for example, in the classroom (Hawkes, 2021). Hawkes explores how the need for classroom

structure and procedural norms help with students' senses of emotional safety. It is necessary to create an environment where students can express themselves, have courageous conversations, and deal with controversies with the fear of threat or harm (Hawkes, 2021).

Rajan (2021) explains that addressing the potential for school violence, which in many cases has an emotional behavioral link, with zero tolerance policies has only worked to cause more harm and disruption. The need for mental health services and the connection to community resources provide tools for both students and families (Rajan, 2021). Rajan concluded that in order to address these concerns, schools need to examine the best ways to implement SEL education into the existing school day and examine ways to best increase the levels of training for staff to address the emotional needs of students.

Understanding trauma-informed practices, such as relationship building, restorative practices, and acknowledging student experiences is necessary for understanding students (Rappaport, 2021). Moving in concert with SEL and trauma-informed practices, Hawkes (2021) found that emotional safety can be further supported by intentional professional development around racial competencies and restorative practices. These experiences will allow teachers to establish knowledge-based relationships with students by understanding better the students' viewpoints. It is necessary to overcome stereotypes and allow for clear and uniform understandings when examining students labeled as at risk in order to form productive and just relationships with staff (Hawkes, 2021; Rappaport, 2021).

SEL and safety must be clearly monitored even when implementing tiered systems of support (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2015). The strategies to

address emotional safety often utilize a tiered system where students are identified as a whole group, targeted small group, or individual intensive (Evans et al., 2015). Evans et al. explored the need for emotional education and safety structures to be conscientious of any unintended impact on students just from the labeling and participation in these tiered systems. Tiered systems often identify positive behaviors and may cause directly or indirectly label negative behaviors. While there is purpose in the practice of tiering emotional supports, the need for emotional safety requires that schools implement SEL practices and support ongoing development with conscious reflection on the context of identified groups and tiers (Evans et al., 2015).

Emotional safety can be examined by how schools address student mental health and look to address or prevent crisis type events (Bohnenkamp et al., 2021). Bohnenkamp et al. hypothesized and supported that comprehensive set of tactics and strategies to address students in behaviors and crisis incidents impacted emotional safety and made impacts on discipline related outcomes. Emotional safety indicators included behaviors, bullying incidents, discipline occurrences, assessments of threats, and referrals to other programs. Bohnenkamp et al. supports that an intentional tiered approach to support emotional behaviors made for safer campuses for the whole student body.

Cuellar and Mason (2019) expand on the need for professional development and services in schools to include social workers. The presence of social workers and potential for continued development of other professional staff are necessary for the protection and development of emotional safety. School leaders who work together with social workers to address emotional safety, school safety, and professional growth have seen an impact due to the positive behavior interventions and supports (Cuellar & Mason,

2019). Community and school partnerships are necessary to address the needs for support including “counseling, mental health, other behavioral resources, health clinics and legal resources” (Cuellar & Mason, 2019, p. 31).

### *Academic Safety*

When thinking of safety in the school environment, physical safety and emotional safety are automatic. Academics is the original purpose of education and may not be viewed as needing examination through a safety lens. With the growing high stakes assessment environment, school report cards, and state and federal measures, the pressures of increasing performance are passed along to our students in multiple ways. The outcome of curriculum, the grade point averages, and the graduation rates are all promoted through teaching and learning. When students do not excel in these measured standards schools utilize a variety of supports to promote academic growth and success. These adjustments to standard instructional practice is the premise of academic safety. By addressing the necessary supports and strategies leaders build a culture that provides students a pathway toward success even when traditional systems fail to yield results. These supports and strategies are necessary to promote a positive culture and keep students focused on the ultimate academic goal of graduation.

Dropout is a concern in education (Kemp, 2006). Students provide assorted reasons for dropout related to school concerns, home or community concerns, and personal concerns (Kemp, 2006). Kemp found increases in the dropout rate for students with disabilities who failed a course or received poor grades. The dropout rate also increased for students with disabilities who were retained in a lower grade and/or unengaged in their academic coursework. While many solutions to support academic

safety have been utilized there is not clear data indicating that any one strategy, such as eliminating the use of retention, recovery programs, extracurricular academic blended programs, or counseling, provides clear data of positive impact (Kemp, 2006). Kemp's 2006 research is evidence that increases in graduation outcomes are achieved with increased student engagement which was observed by student involvement in extracurricular activities.

In addition to dropout prevention, academic safety is necessary to address any gaps in high school completion, such as high school teachers and staff who work to address equivalency options (Zukowski et al., 2021). For the purposes of this review all equivalency options are being considered together and include post high school options, credit recovery during school, and make up credit opportunities. While the listed options are responses to student troubles with academics they also represent the various potentially necessary outcomes if academic safety cannot be established at an earlier time. Zukowski et al. state that pre and post 2020 pandemic data shows disparity in various student populations working to achieve a high school equivalency. These population disparities exist in social, economic, and methods of media access. High school equivalency addresses needs at the end of the secondary schooling experience. Zukowski et al. state that the ages of access and utilization of equivalencies such as the GED have lowered greatly and are now an option to school aged students.

Grading is a necessary practice used in education. The academic safety net as described in Schmidt (2021) explores the use of grades and shifting from a solely a formative measure to one of excellence in achievement. Schmidt also proposes utilizing specific rubrics including self-assessments to shape the student outlook on what the most



desirable outcome should look like. The goal is to promote the student thinking around a picture of successful outcomes and not that the work is a means to the end grade (Schmidt, 2021).

Course grades and academics may give the appearance of being a lesser priority in the face of high stakes testing (Flitcroft et al., 2017). This is due to the focus by many teachers in tested subjects to focus on preparatory lessons and curriculum with constant reminder or direct attention to the goal of students passing the test (Wasserberg & Rottman, 2016). Flitcroft et al. found that many teachers in their study did not intentionally focus on the language used when discussing high stakes testing in class and that the terminology used or tone was automatic.

Academic safety must also overcome well established stereotypes. These stereotypes can form a cyclical process where students become concerned about how they can avoid demonstrating characteristics of the stereotype and lose focus on other areas of growth or success (Wasserberg & Rottman, 2016). Wasserbert and Rottman explain the various established stereotypes around gender, race, and academic aptitude; the authors assert that test centered teacher planning and demand has only led to fortifying stereotypes. This reinforcement of stereotypes is due largely to test centered planning leading teachers to underestimate students' potential performance and set lessened expectations.

Low self-efficacy and learned helplessness are additional areas of academic safety to be addressed. Wasserberg and Rottman (2016) explain that the relationship between the two only grows in environments where academic safety is diminished due to high stakes test and assessment-based curriculum planning. In cases where students feel the

pressure of the stereotypes mentioned above in combination with helplessness or low sense of self, students fail to rise to the standards and demonstrate performance results below expected values (Wasserberg & Rottman, 2016).

Academic language and goal setting are part of academic safety. For positive and effective outcomes academic language needs to be examined. Flitcroft et al. (2017) outlined the following areas in their study: language students heard from teachers, language from others who support, and language that students would like to hear. Flitcroft and team outlined organizing themes and basic themes to the language used in the support of academic outcomes. Teachers can learn from the language students expect to hear in response to their academic progress in order to provide the maximum for student motivation (Flitcroft et al., 2017).

### **Summary**

The school environment is a complex entity that incorporates climate, culture, values, beliefs, and other characteristics that give a school its identity (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017; Tonich, 2021). Consistency and high expectations impact culture for both students and adults and can have an impact on establishing conditions for student academic success (Lambersky, 2016; Prothero, 2021). Student attitudes and aspirations are part of culture. All these attributes can be examined through how leadership views the school's culture and works to establish necessary support for positive outcomes (Harris, 2018). The school environment has variables of students who change from year to year, yet the need to establish and maintain relationships is necessary to maintain a positive climate. These relationships between students, staff, and community strengthen the sense of belonging and empower collaboration for increases in student outcomes.

Leadership in total has the power to impact the climate. Transformational leadership greatly impacts the overall self-perception of teaching staff, bringing higher levels of staff motivation, participation, and commitment (Anderson, 2017). This has several indications of indirect impact on increased student achievement (Anderson, 2017). Gordon (2017) reminds us of the impact of positive leadership and the need for leadership to confront, transform, and remove negativity. Overall, research shows that leadership plays an important role in shaping the culture of a campus.

Examination and understanding of the various needs for student safety while at school is important to understanding and addressing the whole child. While physical safety and academic safety are most commonly addressed, the new focus on emotional safety and social-emotional learning allows for leadership to best provide for the whole child. School leaders must drive and support an environment where the culture reflects and refines school safety to address the needs of the whole student. A positive school climate is shaped by leadership establishing and maintaining a safe learning environment (Prothero, 2021).

Overall, the review of the extant literature clearly indicates that research examining school climate from the perspective of the internal stakeholders is needed. Understanding the dynamics of principal-teacher relationships and the impact on students' safety and academics can help to create a positive school environment that will encourage continued growth and development of all learners. Effective leadership builds the capacity of others through motivation, transformation and the development of a climate that allows for growth. This positive climate impacts the physical, emotional, and academic safety experienced and perceived by students.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of the current investigation is to examine the principal-teacher relationships with regards to school climate and school safety. This study examines school leadership through the transformational lens and the elements of safety related to physical, emotional, and academic needs. Q-methodology was used to observe how these elements work together with school climate to make a stronger school environment. This chapter will reaffirm the research questions, provide an understanding of the methodology utilized, and establish the data analysis outline. The use of Q-methodology in this mixed method study allowed for the collection and analyzation of data to address the research questions.

### **Research Questions**

This researcher worked to determine the most impactful elements of leadership and characteristics of safety that are necessary for a stronger school environment. To this end, information was gathered to better understand the following research questions:

1. What are the elements of strong, positive principal-teacher relationships based on the perceptions of administrators and teachers?
2. What characteristics of the school environment make for a stronger learning environment?
  - a. What elements make for a physically safe environment for students?
  - b. What elements make for an emotionally safe environment for students?
  - c. What elements make for an academically safe environment for students?

3. Is there an association between the reported quality of these relationships, safety, and/or student learning?

Joseph Maxwell (2013) stated that “methods are the *means* to answering...research questions, not a logical transformation of the latter” (p. 100). The research questions posed for this study will be addressed in an inductive manner by utilization of Q-methodology to evaluate participants' perceptions around the most impactful qualities of leadership, safety, and climate to maximize the learning environment.

### **Role of the Researcher**

For this study the researcher sought to secure the sample population by reaching out to principals of non-rural schools servicing grades five through nine in Northeast Ohio. The researcher collected survey results to perform both statistical analysis as well as compiled the common themes reported in the qualitative portions. This data collection and analysis was secured using Q-methodology to allow for themes within the concourse to have interactions and relationships examined. A thorough analysis of the collected data was completed and used to draw conclusions, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further study.

To conduct this study, the researcher sought the approval of Youngstown State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approved the research with the designation exempt. The IRB letter and detail can be found in Appendix A.

### **Participants and Data Collection**

This study is focused specifically on the population of non-rural Northeast Ohio teachers and principals servicing the transitional grades of five through nine. Utilizing the resources and contacts from the Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio

(ESCNEO), which services five counties and 47 member school districts, a voluntary sample will be collected. Of the 47 member school districts however, not all districts identify as urban schools. Twenty of the included districts identify as ‘city schools.’ This sample frame will be built primarily utilizing the current contact lists for principals who service urban and other non-rural schools in Northeast Ohio serving any of the grades five through nine. Further sampling will be completed using staffing contacts for teachers in the same building as the principals from the sample via school directories for the current school year. Participants’ responses were examined based on the research questions to determine teacher-principal relationships and their impact on the school climate during a critical time of transition from elementary to secondary education.

As a mixed method study, Q-methodology will be utilized to analyze both quantitative and qualitative measures with the aim to obtain a broader overall understanding. The use of a digital survey will be used to administer the items for the Q-sort. Q-methodology aims for 20-40 participant responses. Of the 20 districts in the sample, each has at least two schools that fit in the target sample of grades five through nine. A sample including at least one principal and one teacher response from each building would secure a sample with a minimum count of 80. At a 50% participation rate it would be expected to have several participants within the minimums to effectively utilize Q-methodology. More participants than the minimum required for effective utilization of Q-methodology will increase the elements to examine for the validity of the study.

Participants were contacted via email to participate in this study. Participants were provided with information regarding the study including a brief introduction, study

overview, intended outcomes, and potential future implications. Directions were also indicated in the overview as well as a statement that participants were free to leave the survey at any time. The welcome letter with initial directions and opt out are located in Appendix B.

### **Instrumentation and Measurements**

Q-methodology was an adaptation of research practice in 1935 by William Stephenson (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Stephenson determined that the conventional factor utilized in the time could be restructured to account for the method of measure, shifting to examinations around the correlations between individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The drive to understand the association and relations between different individuals as related to a topic motivated Stephenson to quantify the individual's perspectives and thoughts (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Watts and Stenner (2012) explain that through Q-methodology, subjectivity around a topic or problem can be quantified for further study and disaggregation.

The Q-methodology is appropriate for this study as it seeks to examine correlations among the participants as related to their positions, options, and experiences with specific subjects. Recent studies in education utilizing Q-methodology have explored perceptions related to the male elementary teacher shortage (Meader & Larwin, 2022), understanding teacher preparation related to technology preparedness (Clausen et al., 2021), and examining teacher reflections (Lim-Ratnam et al., 2022). The studies provided structure to the correlations among participants to explore trends and inform potential next steps in the respective areas of education.

This application of Q-methodology is a mixed methods approach where participants assign value to statements through a sorting and complete brief open ended questions for analysis. Participants will also be asked to provide demographic information for use in analysis. These statements must be directly associated with elements of the intended study and presented in a clear, concise manner. Wright (2012) indicates that Q-methodology, in its flexible nature, is an appropriate choice for studies in education for broad topics or specific educational practice questions.

Q-methodology was intentionally selected for this study due to the nature of the research questions. This study is seeking to determine statements of value around leadership qualities, elements of safety, and the relationships of teachers and principals. Wright (2012) explains that Q-methodology demonstrated the ability to collect rich data for interpretation and analysis, all while depending on relatively small sample sets. Even with a smaller sample the process of literature review in conjunction with creation of the concourse allows for multiple refinements to ensure that concerns around validity can be accounted for, addressed, or explored.

Creating the concourse involved the collection of statements from the literature review as applicable to the specific topics of the study. These major topics included transformational leadership, school safety, and school climate. The original 60 items collected for the concourse are presented in Appendix C. These items, which are a collection of statements, have been adjusted to highlight themes of school leadership, safety, and climate found in the supporting literature or state education based surveys. In addition to using state base surveys, this researcher also utilized the comprehensive surveying statements from College Board and the ACT.



In order to right size the study to 30 items specifically for the Q-sort, a pilot study was conducted which utilized a mix of principals and teachers to rate the original concourse statements on a Likert scale from 'important to daily practice' to 'not important to daily practice.' Below are the results which have been sorted by theme to be included in the final concourse:

### **Safety**

- I feel safe at this school.
- This school encourages students to take challenging classes no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or cultural background.
- Emotional support is available for both students and staff.
- This school or school district provides effective training in safety procedures to staff (e.g., lockdown training or fire drills).
- This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.
- Students who have low performance measures have clearly established next steps that follow building procedures.
- Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning.
- This school takes effective measures to ensure the safety of students.
- This school places a priority on addressing students' mental health needs.
- Staff at this school do a good job helping parents understand when their child needs to learn social and emotional skills.

## **Leadership**

- Administrators involve staff in decision-making.
- This school effectively handles student discipline and behavior problems.
- The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging.
- There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members.
- School leaders and teachers self-reflect with a critical lens with the purpose of facilitating and driving improvement and change.
- Staff at this school are clearly informed about school policies and procedures.
- Teachers are viewed as a partner in establishing and maintaining the school vision.
- I feel comfortable discussing feelings, worries, and frustrations with my supervisor.
- School leadership awards praise and promotes refinements to next steps.
- School leadership seeks staff feedback as part of a self-reflection process.

## **Climate**

- This school provides instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, handouts) that reflect my cultural background, ethnicity, and identity.
- Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully.
- I feel like I belong.
- Students at this school would feel comfortable reporting a bullying incident to a teacher or other staff.
- Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by teachers in this school, even for students who are not in their classes.
- The school building is clean and well-maintained.
- Staff treat students and fellow staff fairly.
- Students would state they have a positive relationship with a majority of the staff with which they interact.
- School staff view student success as possible and set obtainable goals.
- Expectations are clear for both students and staff.

Demographic questions were included ahead of the Q-sort. Following the sort there were three open ended questions framed around the manner in which the three major themes interact to establish and maintain the relationships between principals and teachers. The responses to these questions have been coded and utilized to speak to the perceived connections between the themes.

All of the materials necessary to complete the data collection were emailed to participants to allow for ease of access, clear instructions, and a brief introduction of both

the researcher and study. Also included in the email were the necessary statements for voluntary participation, information on how the data would be utilized, and an explanation of no potential or anticipated harm because of participation in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Employing the Q-Method Software enabled the researcher to conduct an analysis of the Q-sort responses in an effort to address the research questions and consider the evidence as related to principal-teacher relationships and stronger school environments. Q-Method Software was developed to provide a clear system via an online platform to administer Q-sorts and conduct data analysis. Ultimately, the use of Q-methodology allowed for the consideration of the impact of safety, leadership, and culture on perceived principal-teacher relationship and the school environment. The Q-Method Software specifically allowed for the analysis of several factors including:

- orthogonal or oblique rotation methods
- correlation methods (Pearson, Kendall, or Spearman)
- ranking of statements
- score normalization
- factor scores statement
- factor characteristics
- standard error of differences
- Factor Z-scores correlation (Q-Method Software, 2022).

Additional analysis was conducted utilizing the demographic information collected. The totality of the data was future evaluated with main themes determined from the coding and analysis of the open-ended questions. This analysis was essential to gather a full

understanding of the principal-teacher relationships through the lens of safety, leadership, and climate.

Examination of data includes the understanding of clarity around the validity and reliability of the body. Given the subjective nature of a Q-sort it is difficult to compare finding in subsequent studies. The clear identification of the sample and population is necessary to support validity by adequately representing the viewpoints of the given population (Rost, 2020). Reliability as the view of consistency can be demonstrated with repetitive applications of the Q-sort; however, this statistical significance does not carry the same weight as in R calculations given the subjectivity of the information is directly related to those identified in the population sample.

### **Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions**

There are several assumptions related to the current study. Firstly, the target sample group fits the description of being a teacher or principal who serves grades five through nine in the urban or city setting. These positions hold licensure in the State of Ohio and follow standards of practice, ethical practices, and guidelines set forth by the Ohio Department of Education. In addition, these individuals who will make up the sample set are currently in their active roles in education and are not reflecting on distant practice or the practice of others. It is also assumed that the participants utilize the survey tool independently. This study is not designed to be a collaboration between teachers and principals or other education professionals.

There is the assumption that the terms school climate and school culture are used interchangeably by many members of education. This study will work to define these terms as components of the educational environment. There is also the idea that the

educational environment experienced by staff members overlaps with the environment experienced by students. This assumption may be impacted by a limitation of any current or ongoing work within the participants' buildings relating to shifts in climate or culture.

Leadership is a quality that can be demonstrated by multiple levels of an organization. One does not have to be the organizational head or manager in order to demonstrate leadership qualities. There is some form of leadership in schools that is typically associated with the established positions in the building which follow expectations as set forth by the position description. Principals serve in the current education system as leaders over the essential elements and human capital in their building with measured outcomes based on student performance.

Any collective data related to overall school or grade level academic performance will be derived from the state reported growth and proficiency measures for the appropriate grade level. Each school participates in the application of Ohio State Tests. The data from these tests will be publicly made data which has accounted for enrollment and other considerations for alignment of student score awarding.

There are limitations related to this study, specifically related to the application of the methodology. The definitions of terms and phrases utilized in the concourse are assumed to be aligned with the current literature. There is the chance of misinterpretation of the meaning attributed to the education level and education experience of the participants. This study is focused upon transitional grade levels five through nine. Depending upon the utilized definitions and structures within a school system, the defined culture and grade of transition may vary by simple structure. While the goal to embrace a wide understanding of climate and transitional grades seeks to provide

possible information to a larger audience, this study is limited by the scope of the participants included.

### **Research Ethics**

Even with the intentional selection of the population sample to include transitional grades five through nine, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The first items in the email to potential participants includes an overview of the study, intentions with outcomes, potential risks, and notifications related to consent. As a mixed method study, ethical considerations must be considered from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. In the methods of the study the quantitative ethical considerations included the review of data and inclusion of all data collected regardless of researcher viewpoints. The nature of the study, collecting data from both principal and teacher, provides a significant ethical consideration. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain the need for specific review and respect of power imbalances and the potential for exploitation or pressures related to participation in the study. This study worked to maintain the anonymity of participants and in no way indicated who may have participated from the same school building or district.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to determine, through principal and teacher perspectives, the elements of safety, climate, and leadership that will provide for a strong learning environment. This study is working to consider the patterns and trends among the three theme areas as related to the relationship between principals and teachers and the overall potential implications on the learning environment. Utilizing Q-methodology provided a way to quantify the perceptions of individuals to translate to data for statistical

usage analysis. The data collected for Q-sorting in conjunction with the coded data from free response questions provides the necessary data to conduct data analysis and inform next steps.

This research is intended to better identify and align necessary themes to best prepare school leaders to build effective relationships and drive a positive school environment. Each of the theme areas of safety, leadership, and climate have been identified in the literature and examined through the Q-sort. The next steps will involve the analysis of the data to determine patterns and trends. This analysis will be a combination of mathematical data around the submission of answers in conjunction with the coding and evaluation of free response items. The analysis is what will be used, with reflection of the literature, to provide for the final results and discussion of this study.



## Chapter Four

### Results

This chapter is the presentation of the findings of the current mixed method study which utilized Q-methodology to answer the following research questions posed in Chapter One:

1. What are the elements of strong, positive principal-teacher relationships based on the perceptions of administrators and teachers?
2. What characteristics of the school environment make for a stronger learning environment?
  - a. What elements make for a physically safe environment for students?
  - b. What elements make for an emotionally safe environment for students?
  - c. What elements make for an academically safe environment for students?
3. Is there an association between the reported quality of these relationships, safety and/or student learning?

This chapter includes the presentation of analyzed data culminating in the categories. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the data collected in both the Q-sort and the survey questions support the categories.

The initial categories in this research remained constant with their original form. Through analysis of the data as described in Chapter Three, this research produced the following categorical findings:

- safety in school (physical, emotional, and academic)
- school environment (specifically climate)
- leadership

This chapter will outline the data analyses that were run using the data collected from the online survey tool comprised of the Q-sort and survey questions.

## **Participants**

Study participants received an online link via email blast to complete this study. The survey was initiated by 41 participants. Fully completed surveys were returned by 15 participants. The Q-sort, pre and post survey had a completion rate of 37%.

The age ranges of the participants were as follows: two of the participants were between ages 20-29; seven of participants were between ages 30-39; three of participants were between ages 40-49; and three of participants were between ages 50-59. Additionally, four participants were male (27%); 11 participants were female (73%); 14 participants were Caucasian (93%); and one participant was Black (7%). Participant professions consisted of the following: two participants were principals; four participants were assistant principals; eight participants were teachers; and one participant was another form of educator. Years of experience consisted of one participant with 0-5 years in education; three participants with 6-10 years in education; three participants with 11-15 years in education; five participants with 16-20 years in education; and three participants with 25 or more years in education.

Participants were assigned a random ID through the Q-method software. Viewing this information allows for greater understanding when considering the open response data and the factor analysis. Participants are aligned by participant ID and demographic information in Table 1.

**Table 1.***Participant Demographic Information*

Participant ID	Age		Race/Ethnicity	Years in		Grade
	Range	Gender		Education	Current Role	Levels
90403	30-39	female	Caucasian	6-10	Teacher	7-9
90459	20-29	male	Caucasian	0-5	Teacher	6
90605	20-29	female	Caucasian	6-10	Asst Principal	9
90619	30-39	male	Caucasian	16-20	Principal	6-9
90674	50-59	female	AA/Black	25+	Asst Principal	9
90724	30-39	female	Caucasian	11-15	Asst Principal	6-8
90725	30-39	female	Caucasian	16-20	Teacher	6-8
90809	30-39	female	Caucasian	6-10	Asst Principal	9
90931	30-39	female	Caucasian	11-15	Teacher	7-8
90936	30-39	female	Caucasian	11-15	Teacher	7-8
90981	50-59	female	Caucasian	25+	Teacher	7
90989	40-49	male	Caucasian	16-20	Teacher	9
91003	40-49	male	Caucasian	16-20	Principal	6-8
91009	40-49	female	Caucasian	16-20	Teacher	9
91051	50-59	female	Caucasian	25+	Other Educator	9

## **Q-sort Results**

The methodology for this study utilizes the sorting of statements onto a predetermined normal distribution framework. This technique of analysis groups similar viewpoints and is referred to as the Q-sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Several analyses are included in this section including the correlation matrix, factor analysis, and eigenvalues.

### ***Correlation Matrix***

The correlation matrix for the 15 Q-sort responses is located in Appendix D. Correlations are reported on a scale of +1.00 to -1.00 where a correlation of 0 indicates no shared information. Positive correlations indicated commonality between participants, and negative correlations indicated differences. The closer a correlation is to +/- 1.00 is an indication of the correlation strength.

The 15 Q-sorts were grouped into factors with a Varimax rotation. Varimax rotation utilizes a statistical mathematical equation to align the relationships within factors by reducing the influence of variance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). These factor groups hold similar characteristics. Utilizing auto-flagging set to  $p < 0.05$  to determine the correlations between the factor scores, Table 2 provides the correlations between the three factor scores. The three factors show low correlations to each other which indicates distinctive views from the various Q-sorts.

**Table 2***Correlation Between Factor Scores*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1	1.00	-0.06	0.05
Factor 2	-	1.00	0.04
Factor 3	-	-	1.00

Factor analysis was conducted multiple times to secure the correct number of factors to capture all participants in distinct factors. Five factor and four factor analyses did not result in consensus statements. Two and three factor analysis yielded consensus factors, with three factor analyses yielding an appropriate distribution for distinctiveness. The three-factor model aligned six defining variables in Factor 1, one defining variable in Factor 2, and eight defining variables in Factor 3, which are viewable in Table 3.

**Table 3***Three Factor Analysis*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
No. of Defining Variables	6	1	8
Avg. Rel. Coef.	0.80	0.80	0.80
Composite Reliability	0.96	0.80	0.97
S.E of Factor Z-Scores	0.20	0.45	0.17

Table 4 illustrates the eigenvalues ranging from the highest level of 2.49 to the lowest level of 1.69. The analysis indicates that 42.1% of the variance responses could be identified in three factors. These three factors all exceed the cutoff eigenvalue of 1.0 to be

considered a factor. These eigenvalues demonstrate that a three-factor model is the most efficient and parsimonious in representing the principal and teacher viewpoints.

**Table 4**

*Eigenvalues*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Eigenvalues	2.49	2.17	1.69
% Explained Variance	17	14	11
Cumulative % Expln Var	17	31	42
Humphrey's Rule	0.43	0.51	0.28
Standard Error	0.26	0.26	0.26

**Varimax Rotation**

This study utilized varimax rotation through the Q-method software. Varimax rotation ensures that participate responses are best aligned with other participant response to fit into only one factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Table 5 displays the 15 participant Q-sorts following the Varimax rotation, with factor extraction indicated by an X in the column aligning with the factor.

**Table 5.***Participant Factor Loadings (indicated with X)*

---

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
90725	0.13	0.00	-0.24 X
90605	0.27 X	0.00	0.02
90809	0.15	0.00	0.30 X
91003	0.04	-0.01	0.33 X
90931	0.32 X	0.01	0.07
90936	0.10	0.00	-0.12 X
90989	-0.02	1.47 X	0.02
90724	0.07	0.00	-0.10 X
90403	0.01	0.00	0.20 X
90674	0.29 X	0.00	-0.14
90459	0.19 X	0.00	0.19
91009	0.32 X	0.00	0.05
90619	-0.04	0.00	0.16 X
91051	-0.25 X	0.00	0.12
90981	-0.08	0.00	0.11 X

---

As indicated in Table 5, six participants loaded significantly in Factor 1. One participant loaded significantly as the distinct member of Factor 2. Factor 3 has eight participants with significance. The three factors combined explain 42% of the study variance.

### **Factor Arrays, Identification, and Interpretation**

A factor array can show a visual representation of the aligned viewpoints collected to form the factor. These collections of data correspond to the collective alignment of viewpoints and not specific views of any individual. The factors each provide a view on the elements related to principal teacher relationships. The following sections will address the elements of the factor and provide an array for each of the factors.

#### **Factor 1**

Figure 1 depicts the Factor 1 array which has six statistically loading participants, accounts for 17% of the study variance, and has an eigenvalue of 2.5.



**Figure 1**

*Model Sort for Participants Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 1*



Table 6 lists the distinguishing factors for Factor 1.

**Table 6**

*Distinguishing Statements for Factor 1*

---

Statement Number	Statement
12	This school effectively handles student discipline and behavior problems.
7	Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning.
30	Expectations are clear for both students and staff.
1	I feel safe at this school.
2	This school encourages students to take challenging classes no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or cultural background
6	Students who have low performance measures have clearly established next steps that follow building procedures.
27	Staff treat students and fellow staff fairly.
17	Teachers are viewed as a partner in establishing and maintaining the school vision.
22	Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully
15	School leaders and teachers self-reflect with a critical lens with the purpose of facilitating and driving improvement and change.
26	The school building is clean and well-maintained.

---

*Note.* Distinguishing factors for Factor 1 include participants who are comprised of five Caucasian, one Black, two assistant principals, three teachers and one other educator. Additionally, at the time of the study, four participants worked with grade nine students, one worked with grade six students, and one worked with grades seven and eight. Two different school districts are represented in Factor 1. All levels of experience are represented with two participants indicating 25+ years in education and one for each of the categories: 0-5 years; 6-10 years; and 16-20 years.

### **Factor 1 General Viewpoint**

Factor 1 emphasizes the importance in the effective handling of student behavior and discipline concerns. With clear expectations, Factor 1 views high importance in empowering students to take ownership of their learning. Feelings of safety are necessary at school and within the relationships at school. Participant 91051 summarizes this view point by stating, “when teacher fell unsafe: lack of trust, high absenteeism, lower expectations in the classroom.”

Participant 90403 stated “students and teachers need to feel safe, engaged, connected, and supported by the leadership team.” Participant 90403 continued that the elements of safety are important in the classroom and campus-wide. Participant 90931 expressed the necessity of high expectations by all staff for both students’ academic and behavior related goals. In reference to relationships, Participant 91009 stated, “if a teacher feels safe in all aspects of the relationship [principal-teacher], they will be better able to produce in the classroom and extend better learning opportunities for their students.”

Factor 1 places low importance in a clean and well-maintained building as part of teacher principal relationships. Additionally, Factor 1 presents that a clear vision and teacher participation in creating that vision are not necessary for positive teacher principal relationships. Factor 1 participants do not necessarily engage in critical self-reflecting with the intent to improve conditions in the school.

## **Factor 2**

Figure 2 depicts the Factor 2 array which had one statistically loading participant and accounts for 14% of the study variance. Additionally, Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 2.17.

**Figure 2**

*Model Sort for Participants Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 2*

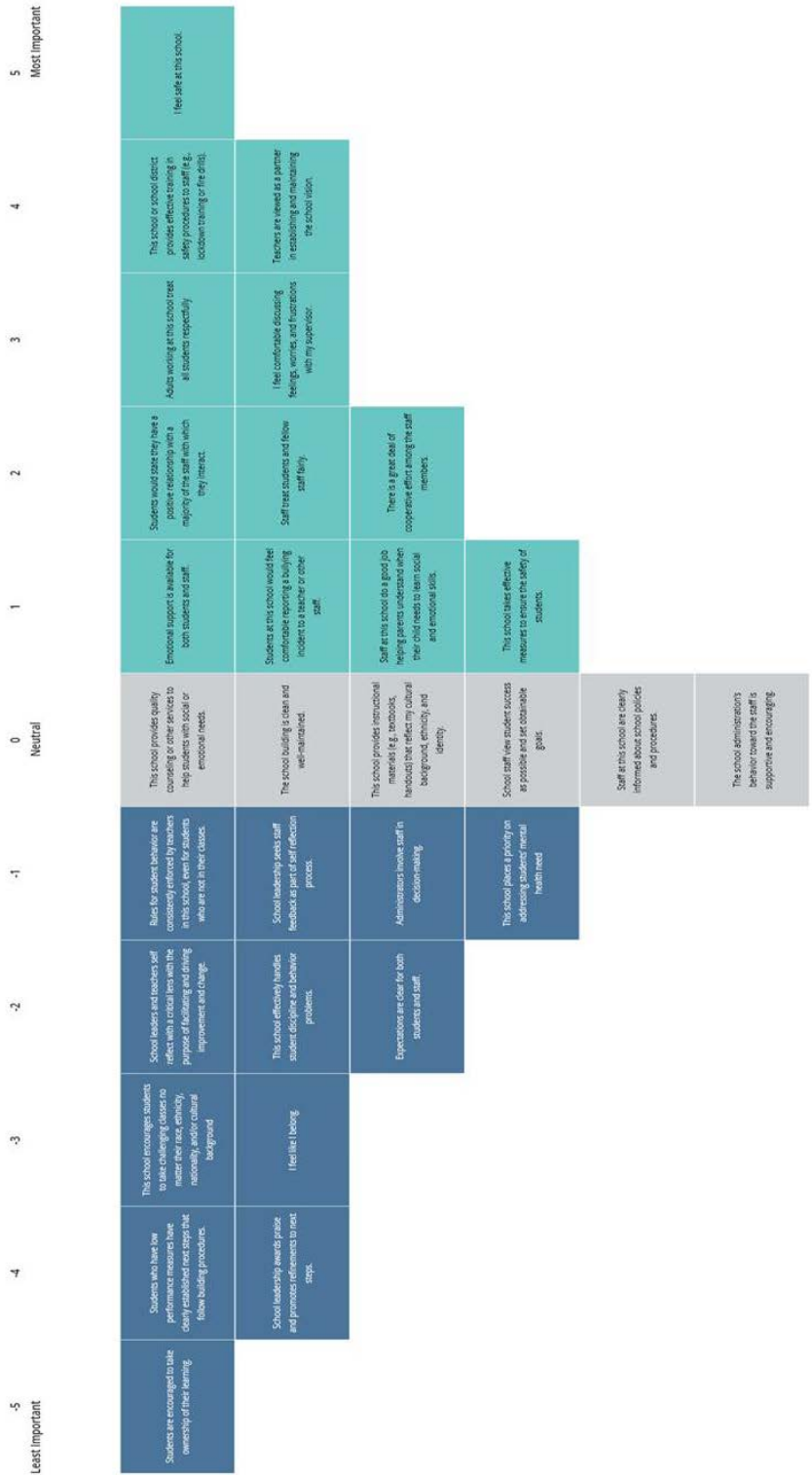


Table 7 lists the distinguishing factors for Factor 2.

**Table 7**

*Distinguishing Statements for Factor 2*

---

Statement Number	Statement
1	I feel safe at this school.
17	Teachers are viewed as a partner in establishing and maintaining the school vision.
22	Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully
18	I feel comfortable discussing feelings, worries, and frustrations with my supervisor.
21	This school provides instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, handouts) that reflect my cultural background, ethnicity, and identity.
6	Students who have low performance measures have clearly established next steps that follow building procedures.
19	School leadership awards praise and promotes refinements to next steps.
7	Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning.

---

*Note.* The participant identified is a Caucasian male teacher with 16-20 years of experience and currently servicing grade nine.

**Factor 2 General Viewpoint**

Factor 2 views center around feelings of safety at schools and the idea that teachers are partners in empowering the vision of the school and cultivating respect for

students. Participant 90989 specifically addressed safety with the statement, “students and staff need to feel safe when they come to school... with the news reporting on violence... our school environment is always being looked at for safety.” Factor 2 also feels that discussion or collaboration with supervisors around challenges and feelings is of great importance. This idea of collaboration is captured by Participant 90989, “teachers need to trust their principals to have their backs when they feel backed in a corner. Teachers need to also trust their principals to bring them into the decision making process and what is going on in the school.”

Student ownership of learning has little importance related to Factor 2 participants. It is not important if school leadership awards praise and the promotion of refining next steps for student outcomes. Cultural representation in the school is of neutral importance for factor two participants.

### **Factor 3**

Figure 3 depicts the Factor 3 array which has eight statistically loading participants, accounts for 11% of the study variance, and has an eigenvalue of 1.69.

**Figure 3**

*Model Sort for Participants Who Loaded Significantly on Factor 3*





*Distinguishing statements for Factor 3*

---

Statement Number	Statement
22	Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully
13	The school administrations behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging.
6	Students who have low performance measures have clearly established next steps that follow building procedures.
9	This school places a priority on addressing students mental health need
7	Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning.
17	Teachers are viewed as a partner in establishing and maintaining the school vision.
14	There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members.
4	This school or school district provides effective training in safety procedures to staff (e.g., lockdown training or fire drills).
1	I feel safe at this school.
24	Students at this school would feel comfortable reporting a bullying incident to a teacher or other staff.
3	Emotional support is available for both students and staff.
5	This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.

---

The participants are comprised of eight Caucasian, two assistant principals, two principals, and four teachers. At the time of the study the participants worked with the following students: one with grade nine students; one with grade seven students; and two

with grades seven and grade eight students. Furthermore, four participants worked with grades six through eight. Additionally, two different school districts and five different schools are represented in Factor 3. The levels of experience represented are 25+ years with one participant, 16-20 years with three participants, 10-15 years with two participants, and 5-10 years with two participants.

### **Factor 3 General Viewpoint**

Factor 3 participants believe strongly in staff treating students with respect and having the support of administrators to encourage progress. Participant 90403 captures this idea stating, “teachers want autonomy, which can be incredibly motivating as long as the schools culture is grounded in a common mission and expectations are aligned... teachers want to be highlighted when they are successful and counseled for improvement and next steps in their journey when they are not.” Students and their wellbeing are areas of importance for Factor 3, specifically addressing mental health, student ownership, and supporting student performance concerns with clear next steps. “An environment that is students first... this type of environment takes into account the experiences that students bring to school daily and works to support them to work through these challenges in order to succeed,” stated by Participant 91003, expresses the importance of an environment that holds students as a primary focus.

Lower importance views include feeling safe at school and student/staff emotional support. The successful reporting of bullying, training around safety procedures, and quality counseling services are of low importance to support relationships in Factor 3 schools.

### **Post Q-Sort Reflection Analysis**

Following the Q-sort, participants were asked a set of three open-ended questions:

- What are the elements of strong teacher-principal relationships?
- What characteristics make for a stronger learning environment?
- How does safety impact teacher-principal relationships?

Only participants who completed the entire Q-sort and survey questions were included in the study data. All 15 participants from the Q-sort provided answers to the post sort questions that were able to be coded. Table 9 provides the outcome of the coding related to the content of each question. A complete list of participants responses can be found in Appendix E.

**Table 9**

*Distribution of Survey Question Coding*

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Question Topic	Code	Count of Code
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Strong Teacher-Principal		
Relationship	Trust	7
	Support	8
	Collaboration	5
	Openness	4
	Expectations	3
	Communication	8
	Respect	4
Environmental Characteristics	Safety	2
	Communication	4
	Support	4
	Stakeholders valued	3
	Resources	4
	Expectations	11
	Student Focused	8
	Communication	
Impact of Safety	Necessary	4
	Discipline	2
	Trust	7
	Professional Support	5
	Classroom Decision	
	making	3

---

## **Discussion**

The three factors explored in this study offer a unique perspective on the qualities and attributes of principal teacher relationships in the areas of safety, leadership, and school culture. Each factor presents a different relationship between the key areas of safety, leadership, and culture to yield to the overall environment experienced by staff in a school building.

The post sort survey demonstrated strength between specific coded themes in areas of trust and expectations. Participant 90403 stated that “the foundation of the teacher-principal relationship is trust.” In a related view, participant 90809 reported that “there must be trust; within the trusting relationship, feedback can be used to impact growth” when considering the working environment and adult relationships. There are several other themes of interest; however, the only theme across all three post sort questions is the idea of support. Participants expressed a need for continued support and in many cases related support to expectations. Participant 90931 stated, “[principal and teachers] view each other as essential partners... teacher realizes they cannot do their job well without the support of the principal... both communicate effectively – principals to teachers of expectations and teacher to principals when they need something.”

Expectations being an area of increased need in principal teacher relationships is a commonality between both factor analysis and post sort survey questions. Participant 90989 stated that “teachers and administrators need to start with expectations on the first day of school” and then continue for the duration of the school year, even relating these expectations to students. Participant 90931 articulated that high expectations were necessary in an environment where teachers felt empowered and were led by

administrators with a clear vision. Study participants rank and explain that consistent expectations are necessary for positive relationships and potential to impact student growth. Without a foundation of safety, Participant 90931 stated that “there is no relationship.” A breakdown of safety leads to a lack of trust, which then leaves teachers feeling powerless, unsupported and unable to grow their students. Factors consistently rated expectations from neutral to high importance and extended post sort answers explained the need for stronger positive expectations from principals to foster greater relationships.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the results of a Q-methodology-based factor analysis were presented to capture diverse perspectives on principal-teacher relationships. The study utilized a 30 item Q-sort survey, accompanied by pre and post surveys for demographic information and open ended responses on research topics. Fifteen participants were categorized into three factors, each representing distinct viewpoints.

Factor 1, comprised of six participants (17% variance), emphasized effective student behavior management, fostering student ownership of learning, and prioritized safety; however, did not prioritize facility maintenance. Factor 2, with one participant (14% variance), highlighted school safety, teacher partnerships, and collaboration, valuing discussion with peers over leadership praise. Factor 3, involving eight participants (11% variance), emphasized respectful treatment of students, administrator support, and student well-being and progress. The post-survey coding identified themes of trust, support, and communication across all three factors; therefore, offering valuable

insights to address the study's research questions in the subsequent discussion and recommendations in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Five**



## **Discussion**

The adult interactions of public school contribute to the overall flow, function, and feel of the school for all constituents. Studies regarding the school environment involve topics such as culture, emotions, experiences, and adult relationships within the school (Pinkas & Bulić, 2017). This study has explored adult relationships in post-pandemic urban public education, focusing on administrators and teachers serving grades six through nine.

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary and analysis of the findings from the Q-methodology-based factor analysis conducted to explore diverse perspectives on principal-teacher relationships, safety, leadership, and school culture. The chapter begins by reviewing the research questions at the foundation of this study. Additionally, this chapter will also summarize the identified factors and their distinguishing characteristics in conjunction with open responses, followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings for educational practice and policy.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this section, the findings in this study align with the research questions. The three primary research questions will be aligned with corresponding attributes from the Q-sort factor analysis and the open-ended survey questions. Findings from the investigation support conclusions around each research question and will frame further implications and recommendations for further study.

*Research Question 1: What are the elements of strong positive principal-teacher relationships based on the perceptions of administrators and teachers?*

First, survey question coding indicated that elements of trust, support, and communication were the most common when discussing strong positive principal-teacher relationships. Also notable were collaboration, openness, and respect. Participant 90403 explained, “the foundation of the teacher-principal relationship is trust.” Participant 90403 went on to explain the significance of support in executing a clearly communicated vision and mission.

The elements of Factor 3 further contribute to the idea of having administrator support. This factor was comprised of an even distribution of administrators and teachers, and element of support was addressed by both principals and teachers. Participant 90725 stated, “open communication, offering support and solutions instead of just critiques” when addressing positive relationship elements.

Communication was mentioned by participants represented in all the factors. The idea of clear communication can be tied to ethical leadership and ensures that all staff relationship have voice in the decision-making process (Bass et al., 2018). For example, principals and teachers in Factor 3 expressed their belief in partnership to establish and maintain the school vision. Furthermore, Factor 3 participants believe that school administrators need to be supportive and encouraging.

*Research Question 2: What characteristics of the school environment make for a stronger learning environment?*

The second research question further examined the elements of physical safety, emotional safety, and academic safety. Safety may be a broadly used topic to define a school environment; however, the examination of physical, emotional, and academic safety provided more clarity on what contributes to a stronger learning environment.

While examining the principal-teacher relationship it became clear that students played a role based upon participants' viewpoints.

When asked the open-ended survey question, "What characteristics make for a stronger learning environment?", participants provided focused answers to indicate a great need for safety and for clear expectations. Participant 90403 stated, "students and teacher need to feel safe, engaged, connected, and supported by the leadership team." This participant explained that these conditions were not only necessary in the classroom, but also must exist as clear expectations throughout the entire campus.

A further elaboration on the need for safety and clear expectations was stated by Participant 90724 who indicated a need for alignment of expectations to daily practice. Participant 90724 summarized that there is a difference between having a written structure or policy, and that there also needs to be commitment to ensure that the policy is a clear expectation and is enforced with consistency and clarity to all stakeholders. Factor 1 findings support feeling of safety as a primary contributor to the school's overall environment, specifically with teachers being empowered in their relationship with principals. This builds on the ideas presented by Lambersky (2016) who states that respecting the professionalism and capacity with the principal teacher relationship increases collective efficacy of staff and impacts the environment.

Open-ended question analysis indicated the environmental characteristics of strong learning environments, including expectations and being student focused. Factor 3 findings mirror the need for student focused environments where students and the wellbeing of students were considered areas of significance. This supports the trend for student centered learning to be implemented in current principal and teacher performance

evaluations. Given that a focus on students has been determined to be a significant environmental factor, in addition to the staff relationships, student focus could impact staff relationships.

*Research Question 3: Is there an association between the reported quality of these relationships, safety, and/or student learning?*

The current application of the state report card system for building and/or district star ratings did not demonstrate any significance in student outcomes relating to which factor or elements were expressed by the study participants. Various districts and buildings participated in this study; however, there is not enough data to determine the significance in student outcomes. The findings outlined to address the third research question will address student learning as discussed by participants. Student outcomes and academics were not included as specific elements in the Q-sort or survey questions; however, survey analysis Participant 91009 indicated safety and relationships translates into “better learning opportunities for their students,” and Participants 91051 and 90981 both indicated that adult relationships impact the expectations for the students.

In their responses, Participant 91051 aligned with Factor 1, explaining that student behavior is a critical element to address and that feelings of safety are important for staff relationship and student success. Participant 91051 explained that if trust, being a necessary element for relationships, is lost it is due to teachers feeling unsafe, the result is lower classroom expectations. Participant 91003 explained that “safety affects trust and that trusts greatly impacts teacher principal relationships. If teachers don’t feel safe, typically they blame the principal and that breaks down the trust between the two parties.”

The association appears to exist between the quality of the principal-teacher relationship and the reported safety. Safety is valued as reported alongside collaboration and support from administrators to teachers. There are clear implications for further study as it relates to adult relations to other school elements, such as adult impact on staff morale and collaboration, impact on mental health, and establishing expectations for all elements of running a school.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Educators and school leaders should prioritize building trust and establishing clear expectations as key elements of strong principal-teacher relationships. Regular communication and collaboration, as highlighted in Factor 1, are essential to foster a supportive environment. Creation of a supportive environment through communication and collaboration is a specific skill to develop in future principal training and new hire teacher on boarding within a school or district.

School administrators should prioritize creating a physically, emotionally, and academically safe environment for both students and staff. Emphasizing safety procedures, promoting respectful treatment, and considering diverse cultural backgrounds in instructional materials, as indicated in Factor 2, contribute to a more inclusive learning environment. Principals need to provide a collaborative medium to create and maintain safety plans that elaborate beyond physical safety measures.

Schools need to prioritize student mental health and emotional well-being, as emphasized in Factor 3. Implementing effective strategies to support students emotionally, academically, and behaviorally will contribute to a positive school climate and promote student success. Professional development opportunities should focus on

enhancing educators' abilities to effectively manage student behavior, create a positive school climate, and support student learning and well-being. Addressing these areas aligns with the priorities highlighted in all three factors.

The element of expectations was found across this study. While it may be reported that expectations are established, the implications of this study require that expectations be more regularly maintained, revised, measured, and accounted for with staff. Principals need to determine if they have clear expectations and an established system to evaluate the progress toward those expectations to impact the overall school environment.

Transformational leadership works to establish a school vision, invigorate teachers, and support teacher autonomy (Lassiter et al., 2022). This study carries implications that transformational leadership is both effective and necessary to creating effective principal-teacher relationships and having an impact on the greater school environment. Through the factors and post-survey, key elements of transformational leadership were found in the various themes. These include diverse perspectives on relationships, importance of safety, expectations, trust, support, and communication.

Additionally, transformational leaders should recognize diverse viewpoints and adapt their styles to accommodate diverse needs. Transformational leaders should prioritize creating physically emotional and academically safe spaces to foster positive relationships and must establish clear expectations from the outset. Furthermore, leaders must create an environment of trust to facilitate growth and collaboration. Overall, transformational leaders must prioritize providing ongoing support while fostering open and effective communication channels among staff.

Moreover, principals should adopt a flexible leadership approach building from transformational stance that acknowledges and respects varying viewpoints and needs within the school environment. School principals and building leaders must implement measures to ensure a safe environment across physical, emotional, and academic dimensions, and consider the unique priorities highlighted in each factor. An emphasis on building trust and setting clear, consistent expectations to nurture positive relationships between principals and teachers is essential to foundational practice. Principals must seek the tools to foster a culture of ongoing support and communication among staff members to encourage collaboration and growth.

### **Future Research Considerations**

The following are research considerations based on the summary of each of the factors established in this study. These considerations are based upon the data collected, the interpretation of the data, and the alignment to the given research questions. Also included are research considerations based upon the limitations of the study.

Factor 1, representing 17% of the variance, underscores the importance of effective student behavior management and the importance of fostering student ownership of learning. Participants in this factor prioritize safety and clear expectations while placing lower importance on facility maintenance and formalized vision creation within the school. Additionally, Factor 1 emphasizes the need for students to take challenging classes and the need for clear procedures for students with low performance measures. Future research considerations can build upon this study by examining student perceptions of school environment and relationship factors. Furthermore, student perceptions could then be compared to adult perceptions.

Factor 2, accounting for 14% of the variance, places a strong emphasis on school safety, collaborative teacher partnerships, and respectful communication within the school community. Participants in this factor value feelings of safety, respectful treatment of students, and open discussion of feelings and concerns with supervisors. The factor also suggests that cultural representation in instructional materials is of neutral importance. A future research consideration centers around the community impact on the adult relationships and adult interactions. Further, questions can examine how community impacts the students or the learning environment or examine how community impact on adult relationships can influence the learning environment and student academic outcomes.

Factor 3, representing 11% of the variance, highlights the significance of respectful treatment of students, administrator support, and student well-being. This factor places emphasis on addressing students' mental health needs, providing emotional support, and promoting a cooperative effort among staff members. Safety and clear expectations are important, but the factor places lower importance on specific safety training and emotional support. Future research opportunities may explore how principal teacher or staff relationships impact the specific views and frequency of addressing and providing for student mental health needs.

Across the factors and through the direct answers of the post survey the theme of expectations became clear. With the topic of expectations expressed across the research results, a necessary next step is to research to what degree and level of expectations the participants refer to. Expectations of a position or job can be described in employment position descriptions, collective bargaining agreements, and board of education policies.



The State of Ohio imposes expectations for all education and educational practice levels. Specific district, community, and district leadership expectations are necessary to review from both the adult and student lens.

Overall, this research was limited to voluntary participants from urban school districts and specific to those serving grades six through nine. This study may prove fruitful to be used with a whole staff on a specific campus to provide necessary reflection for the campus leader. The larger urban districts in Ohio could use this study to examine the practices within the secondary campuses to determine specific staffing changes, necessary supports, or to provide specific feedback as part of the Ohio Improvement Process.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings of the Q-methodology-based factor analysis, highlighting distinct perspectives on principal-teacher relationships, safety, leadership, and school culture. The identified factors shed light on the multifaceted nature of the educational environment and underscore the importance of building trust, setting clear expectations, prioritizing safety, and promoting student well-being. These insights have significant implications for educational practice and policy, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to school improvement that addresses various dimensions of the educational experience for both students and educators.

This study provides insight into the need for continued research and investigation in the potential correlation between principal-teacher relationship through the lens of safety, academics, and leadership. Because expectations was a common theme, this study gives currently serving principals items to consider as the work to continually revise the

school practices to improve the systems for all stakeholders. Central office and district leaders can look at the three factors in this study to consider how they may need to observe or collect data regarding their buildings, leaders, and instructional staff. The findings of the current investigation shed light on the multifaceted nature of principal-teacher relationship and underscore the importance of safety, trust, and communication within these dynamics. Transformational leaders can leverage these insights to tailor their approach and cultivate a conducive environment for positive relationships and enhanced student learning outcomes.

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**Appendix A**  
**IRB Approval Letter**



May 30, 2023 3:03:52 PM EDT

Karen Larwin  
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2023-298 Principal-Teacher Relationships and Making a Stronger School Environment

Dear Dr. Karen Larwin:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Principal-Teacher Relationships and Making a Stronger School Environment

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 1. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

Findings: I could not see the survey questions but did get through the initial Q sort, where the potential identifiers (gender, age, race, etc) were located. I deem this survey to meet the requirements for exemption. The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,  
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board

## Appendix B

### ONLINE CONSENT

Hello! I am a doctoral student at Youngstown State University and a current public school educator. I am completing my dissertation in the topic of principal – teacher relationships. I am inviting you to participate in an online sorting activity so that I can examine the relationship between leadership, climate and safety. You are receiving this email because you are a principal or teacher in a non-rural school that services any of the grades 5-9. Your participation would be greatly appreciated!

If you agree to take part in the study, there will be three brief parts to the survey. First will collect various demographic information such as gender, level of education, year of experience, position type and building type. Second will be a Q-sort where you will sort 30 statements based upon your experience, belief and value. Lastly, there will be three questions addressing leadership, climate, and safety.

You may not directly benefit from this study. We do hope that your participation will allow for meaningful considerations with future professional development and preservice development of principals.

We believe this study is free of known risks. This study is being conducted online and therefore is subject to any risks associated with online activity. Our goal is for your answers to remain confidential, therefore we are using a secure website to administer the study. The survey will not collect any information such as email or computer IP address.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

The online link will be open and available for two weeks. If any questions about this study or any issues with the survey, you may contact the researcher, Walter Noland at 216-438-1360 or the Doctoral Chair, Dr. Karen Larwin, at 330-941-2236. Should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Services at [YSUIRB@ysu.edu](mailto:YSUIRB@ysu.edu) or 330-941-2377.

Thank you for your valuable participation!

## Appendix C

60 original statements included in pilot survey.

Please indicate a value for each statement below:

(1: Not important to daily practice; 5: Important to daily practice)

<b>Safety (10- blanced between; physical, emotional/psychological, academic)</b>				
Students feel physical safety when at school.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Students feel emotionally safe when at school.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
I feel safe at this school.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school encourages students to take challenging classes no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or cultural background				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school provides effective support for students needing alternative modes of communication (e.g., manual signs, communication boards, computer-based devices, picture exchange systems, Braille).				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Staff do a good job helping parents to support their children's learning at home.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school or school district provides effective training in safety procedures to staff (e.g., lockdown training or fire drills).				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school provides quality counseling or other services to help students with social or emotional needs.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important

This school places a priority on helping students with their social, emotional, and behavioral problems.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

There are multiple layers for students to experience academic success.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

Students who have low performance measures have clearly established next steps that follow building procedures.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

My school is reactive to safety concerns instead of proactive.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

Emotional support is available for both students and staff.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

This school takes effective measures to ensure the safety of students.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

Staff at this school help students develop strategies to understand and control their feelings and actions.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

This school places a priority on addressing students' mental health needs.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

Staff at this school feel that it is a part of their job to prepare students to succeed in college.

Staff at this school do a good job helping parents understand when their child needs to learn social and emotional skills.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
Not important                      Neutral                      Important

Staff at this school help students see what is the right thing to do and help them understand it

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Not important	2	3	4	5
		Neutral		Important
<b>Leadership (10)</b>				
Staff at this school have many informal opportunities to influence what happens within the school.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Administrators involve staff in decision-making.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
I feel comfortable discussing feelings, worries, and frustrations with my supervisor.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school inspires me to do the very best at my job.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school effectively handles student discipline and behavior problems.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School leaders must be both trustworthy and charismatic with a clear and attainable mission and vision.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School leaders encourage followers to identify with them and follow their example.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School leaders must be motivational and inspirational.				
1	2	3	4	5

Not important		Neutral		Important
School leaders and teachers self-reflect with a critical lens with the purpose of facilitating and driving improvement and change.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School leaders must focus on individual needs and relate to followers on a one-to-one basis.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Principals and instructional staff need to have a good relationship.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Staff at this school are clearly informed about school policies and procedures.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Teachers are viewed as a partner in establishing and maintaining the school vision.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
I feel comfortable discussing feelings, worries, and frustrations with my supervisor. School leadership is growth focused even with professional mistakes made by any staff member.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School leadership awards praise and promotes refinements to next steps.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School leadership seeks staff feedback as part of self reflection process.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
<b>Climate (10)</b>				
This school provides instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, handouts) that reflect my cultural background, ethnicity, and identity.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully.				
1	2	3	4	5



Not important		Neutral		Important
My level of involvement in decision making at this school is fine with me.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
I feel like I belong.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
I think that bullying is a frequent problem at this school.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Students at this school would feel comfortable reporting a bullying incident to a teacher or other staff.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Instructional delivery is hindered in this building due to a lack of physical or tangible resources.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Instructional delivery is hindered in this building due to human (teacher/staff/student) factors.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Staff at this school work together to ensure an orderly environment.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machines are available as needed by the staff.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by teachers in this school, even for students who are not in their classes.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.				

1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
The school building is clean and well-maintained.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Staff at this school expect students to do their best all the time.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Staff treat students and fellow staff fairly.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Students would state they have a positive relationship with a majority of the staff with which they interact.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
School staff view student success as possible and set obtainable goals.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
This school encourages students to take challenging classes no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or cultural background				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important
Expectations are clear for both students and staff.				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important		Neutral		Important

## Appendix D

Correlation Matrix, 15 Q-sort Participants

Participant	046P	1MIR	3112	7S28	9ZQ2	ANFN	CAID	F7UQ	HZ3A	IDZM
046P	1	0.14	0.18	-0.19	0.25	-0.03	0.01	0.14	-0.05	0.26
1MIR	0.14	1	0.14	-0.03	0.26	0.18	0.32	0.24	0.32	0.37
3112	0.18	0.14	1	0.18	0.29	-0.07	-0.12	-0.16	0.16	-0.07
7S28	-0.19	-0.03	0.18	1	0.16	0.1	-0.01	-0.19	0.08	0.01
9ZQ2	0.25	0.26	0.29	0.16	1	-0.1	0.1	0.05	0.07	0.36
ANFN	-0.03	0.18	-0.07	0.1	-0.1	1	-0.06	0.3	0.07	0.29
CAID	0.01	0.32	-0.12	-0.01	0.1	-0.06	1	0.08	0.42	0
F7UQ	0.14	0.24	-0.16	-0.19	0.05	0.3	0.08	1	0.36	0.18
HZ3A	-0.05	0.32	0.16	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.42	0.36	1	-0.04
IDZM	0.26	0.37	-0.07	0.01	0.36	0.29	0	0.18	-0.04	1
KMQ1	-0.32	0.21	0.32	0.04	0.14	0.01	-0.18	0.04	0.09	0.07
MHV0	-0.05	0.24	0.27	0.08	0.27	-0.04	-0.19	-0.16	-0.03	0.27
Q8Q4	0.06	-0.07	0.2	0.08	0.05	0.02	0.15	0.15	0.03	-0.04
S0WQ	-0.15	-0.09	-0.12	0.04	-0.1	-0.05	0.34	-0.01	0.32	-0.43
SXFW	-0.05	-0.14	-0.13	0.11	0.02	0.11	-0.29	0.13	-0.04	-0.26

## Appendix E

### Post Q-sort Survey Responses

Study Code	What are the elements of strong teacher - principal relationships?	Thinking about the whole school environment, what characteristics make for a stronger learning environment (opportunity for learning)??	How does safety (physical, emotional, academic) impact teacher-principal relationships?
HZ3A	<p>The foundation of the teacher- principal relationship is trust. Teachers want autonomy, which can be incredibly motivating as long as the schools culture is grounded in a common mission and expectations are aligned. Teachers want to be highlighted when they are successful and counseled for improvement and next steps in their journey when they are not. Teacher want principals who facilitate, support, and reinforce to support the school mission as well. Lastly, sigificant interation help build a strong teacher-principal relationship to build confidence and a collective mission.</p>	<p>Students and teachers need to feel safe, engaged, connected, and supported by the leadership team. These elements are important inside the classroom but also throughout the entire building. All stakeholders need to feel a strong sense of community so they feel valued, respected, and connected. Parents and community need to also feel engaged, connected, and supported so they too can help support the learners.</p>	<p>Physical: This is most fundamental for all stakeholders. The communication about incidents in the building, discipline procedures, and next steps are most important in terms of physical safety.</p> <p>Emotional: Teachers need to feel they are in a environment that nurtures them professionally and that they have supports and connections within the building.</p> <p>Academic: Teachers need to able to advoate for students and have autonomy to be treated as a professional in terms of decisions in their classroom. Teacher need to be inspired, heard, and supported by their principal.</p>

<p>KMQ1</p>	<p>As an educator, I appreciate when a principal maintains a positive rapport with their staff. I enjoy constructive feedback and leadership. When a teacher is supported properly, they don't feel "burn out". Personally, my first year went great! I was supported where needed and knew who to call when an issue outside my capabilities occurred, and I didn't feel "judged" for utilizing other people. Staff did not have meetings "just to have a meeting". They were beneficial. I was called to be a part of the PBIS team and enjoyed having my voice heard when deciding on school initiatives. Positive recognition for students is something we do daily, why not do it for staff as well?</p>	<p>For teachers, optional professional development opportunities. Teachers don't mind attending meetings, when they are beneficial and very closely aligned to practices in the classroom. I remember attending a meeting and leaving with resources I could use the next day! This opportunity for learning was very strong.</p> <p>For students, they benefit the most when they are provided guided practice, varied assessment, and re-teach opportunities. This is the job mostly of the teacher, and administrators as well as academic coaches can support us through providing resources to use in our classroom.</p> <p>For example, I like using <a href="http://storyboardthat.com">storyboardthat.com</a>, <a href="http://Quizziz">Quizziz</a>, <a href="http://IXL">IXL</a>, and <a href="http://Flocabulary">Flocabulary</a>. District memberships so I'm not spending my own money on classroom resources will always be appreciated by staff and support learning through student engagement in varied activities.</p>	<p>It's obviously hard to teach when the first thing a student does upon entering your classroom is cry and start venting to other students about what happened the previous class. Counselors and Social Workers are a MUST in every school district! My building has THREE and we need every last one of them. Teachers need other people to rely on in order to effectively teach, they can't do everything on their own. We need people (counselors, discipline, administrators, mentors, etc.) we can send a student! Otherwise, 19 kids are losing an education because of the behavior of 1. I can't emphasize that last statement enough. This impacts teacher-principal relationships because we realize that we have each other's backs.</p>
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1MIR	Trust, Openness, Support, Collaboration,	high academic/behavioral expectations for all, sense of belonging, strong teacher - student relationships, safe learning environment, access to curriculum that reflects all student demographics, access to counseling and SEL curriculum	If teachers do not feel safe in their school then it will have a negative impact on the relationship that they will have with their principal. This will result in lack of communication and collaboration between the teacher and principal. The teacher will not trust the leadership capabilities of the principal. Also, the teacher will be less likely to go to the principal with questions, comments or concerns. I believe the negative teacher-principal relationships will have a profound impact on student learning and growth. Teachers will be less likely to try new innovative instructional strategies, collaborate with their fellow teachers, and implement building initiatives. This will cause student learning to be stagnant.
Q8Q4	Clear communication; clear expectations; supporting when things go wrong	Clear expectations; sense of community school spirit	If staff doesn't feel safe, the relationship will be poor. If teachers don't feel supported in academic decision, the relationship will be poor. If there isn't an emotional understanding or connection, the relationship will fail. it cultivates an environment of respect, support and trust
IDZM	communication, listening, collaboration and self reflection	structure, rapport, communication and a commitment to growth	

F7UQ	Consistent communication, open and honest conversations, mutual respect	<p>Consistency-expectations, follow-through, procedures</p> <p>safety-comfortable speaking freely, not afraid to come to school, trust teachers to have their best interest at heart</p> <p>Push-push students to be their best, reach past their "potential", and take challenging courses</p>	<p>If teachers do not feel safe physically or emotionally then they will not come to work consistently. They will then not be able to help their students feel safe physically or emotionally.</p> <p>Teachers also have to feel safe to own their academics. They need to have the freedom to try what they think is best.</p> <p>All of this will keep a healthy relationship between teachers and principals.</p>
046P	Open communication, offering support and solutions instead of just critiques	<p>Whatever rules and protocols, etc. are put in place need to be followed or they don't need to be expectations, consequences need to be natural - meaning they need to be immediate and relate to the "offense" since suspending does not change the behavior.</p>	<p>If staff don't feel safe and feel that admin are not hearing them about their concerns they will be less effective in supporting students and making them feel safe if they come to work at all.</p>
3112	There must be trust. Within the trusting relationship, feedback can be used to impact growth.	<p>Admin &amp; teachers working collaboratively and having high expectations and beliefs about the capacity of their team and their students.</p>	<p>Teachers must feel safe. Otherwise, it will lead to poor teacher-principal relationships.</p>

9ZQ2	<p>They view each other as essential partners. The teacher realizes they cannot do their job well without the support of the principal, and the principal recognizes the "front line" nature of teacher jobs and therefore does everything in their power to allow them to do their job free of interruption/unnecessary challenge. Both communicate effectively - principals to teachers of expectations (with clear, reasonable paths for how to get there) and teachers to principals when they need something.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High expectations of students' academic and behavioral success, held by all staff</li> <li>- Feeling that where they are is special and that what they do has impact</li> <li>- Teachers who are empowered to make decisions about what is best for students</li> <li>- Administration with a clear vision for the future and the capacity/resources to make it happen</li> </ul>	<p>Without baseline safety, there is no relationship. A breakdown of safety leads to a lack of trust in administration by teachers and a feeling of powerlessness among teachers.</p>
ANFN	<p>Communication Mutual Feedback Encouragement Rapport</p>	<p>Staff and student relationships being positive School wide celebrations/spirit week Positive feedback for students (PBIS) Relevance over rigor</p>	<p>IMMENSELY. If you can't have a casual conversation with administration, I feel that students and staff are less likely to even attempt to give accurate feedback.</p>
SXFw	<p>The teacher feels that they are being treated with respect. Teacher need to feel like they are heard when concerns are brought to the principal. Teachers should see that staff are being treated the same across the board.</p>	<p>Teachers have high expectations for students and students are encouraged to meet them. Students should not just be passed along because they attended school when they did not pass any classes. Students should see that all students are treated equally for the same behaviors. Students should not be allowed to disrupt other students learning.</p>	<p>Safety is not discussed between teachers and administrators. Teachers at my building feel that their safety is not important. Teachers don't even feel free to have conversations with the principal about safety because they also feel like they have no control on how things are handled.</p>



CAID	<p>I think trust is one of the main elements of a strong teacher-principal relationship. An administrator must be able to trust their teachers with keeping each of their students safe. They trust their teachers to provide each of their students the best, most challenging education that each of their students can handle. Teachers need to trust their principals to have their backs when they feel backed in a corner. Teachers need to also trust their principals to bring them into the decision making process and what is going on in the school.</p>	<p>I think teachers and administrators need to start with expectations on the first day of school and follow through with these expectations the whole year. Teachers also need to build a strong and respectful relationship with each of their students. This will help the teachers build lessons that are challenging but attainable, and will allow the students to be comfortable with asking questions and learning from their teachers.</p>	<p>Students and staff need to feel safe when they come to school. With the news reporting on violence (mass murders, bullying, and other violence like suicide) our school environment is always being looked at for safety. Teachers look at their administrative staff to develop and follow through on safety plans that keep them and their students safe. The principals need to feel confident in their staffs ability to follow the safety plan and keep themselves and their students lives safe.</p>
7S28	<p>A balance of support and challenge; being willing to challenge and coach teachers to be their best while providing support for them to get there.</p>	<p>An environment that is students first. This type of environment takes into account the experiences that students bring to school daily and works to support them to work through these challenges in order to succeed.</p>	<p>Safety affects trust and that trust greatly impacts teacher-principal relationships. If teachers don't feel safe, typically they blame the principal and that breaks down the trust between the two parties.</p>
MHV0	<p>Principal respects and is open to ideas and thoughts of staff members. Staff members feel that the admin is approachable and will not hold questions or concerns against a staff member.</p>	<p>School-wide discipline policies which are actually followed for each and every student. Get the "problem children" out of the general education environment so that all students can be successful without barriers being placed on them from the behaviors and interactions of other students. Provide more opportunities for enrichment and growth for all levels of learning.</p>	<p>If a teacher feels safe in all aspects of the relationship, they will be better able to produce in the classroom and extend better learning opportunities for their students.</p>

S0WQ	Collaboration Respect Trust Accountability	Active Learning, Collaborative Learning, Constructive Learning, Authentic Learning, and Goal-Directed Learning.	When teachers feel unsafe: Lack of trust High absenteeism Lower expectations in the classroom
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