INCREASING STAFF MORALE IN TODAY’S SCHOOL CLIMATE WITH INCREASED TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES, HIGH-STAKES TESTING, AND DECREASED SCHOOL FUNDING

by

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Abstract

In today’s schools with increased teacher expectations, high-stakes testing, and decreased school funding, schools need to make an effort to increase staff morale. Staff morale affects the school in measurable ways including student performance on high-stakes testing and school climate. Principals are the primary members of the school community who have the ability to make lasting impacts to improve staff morale. Despite limited resources a principal can find ways to increase the staff morale and consequently other aspects of the school. Principals should support teachers, provide opportunities for teachers to build relationships, and provide teachers with autonomy.
Chapter I – Introduction

Today’s teachers face increased responsibilities, particularly preparing students for high-stakes testing with limited resources to meet these goals. As expectations are increased school funding has decreased. Responsibilities for school leaders have also increased and principals have worked to try to balance their daily duties. All of these stressors can negatively impact the school climate. With all of the responsibilities and expectations of a principal in today’s schools, why should a principal need to focus time and energy on staff morale? Staff morale has a measurable effect on student performance in multiple ways. A positive school climate is beneficial for students and staff. A positive school climate increases academic performance, enhances social and emotional skills and retains teachers (Keiser & Schulte, 2009). In a system with low staff morale, teacher turnover is high thus impacting student performance. Teacher retention also has an impact on raising student test scores. A teacher typically needs to teach for five years to gain the experience necessary to improve student performance. (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). A school with a positive school climate increases staff morale. When teachers feel like they are contributing members of the school community, that their opinions are valuable, and that they have strong relationships at work, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their job. Teachers that work in caring and supportive school environments are more likely to face the school wide challenges and pressures for students to perform on high-stakes tests (Belenardo, 2001). Principals who put effort into increasing staff morale will reap benefits that are much greater than satisfied teachers.

The principal is a very important piece to a successful school. Understanding what influences teacher job satisfaction can help the principal by identifying which parts of the organization need special attention or improvement (Baughman, 1996).
Statement of the Problem

In today’s schools expectations of teachers have increased. There are many external factors that increase stress in the work place. Demands are placed on teachers that were not previously imposed. Teachers are responsible for educating students and making sure all students are proficient on the high-stakes test. School funding has been cut each of the past five years in Michigan. These cuts cause increased class sizes and decreased resources. All of these stressors can have an impact on staff morale. Low staff morale can have a negative impact on student performance. In an era where student test scores are more important than ever, a school cannot afford to have low staff morale. School leaders need to make targeted efforts to increase staff morale which will then impact student attitudes and performance on high-stakes testing.

Research Question

How can school leaders increase staff morale in today’s school climate with increased teacher responsibilities, high-stakes testing, and decreased school funding?

Definition of Terms

Engaged Teacher is an environment that contains supportive staff, friendship and trust among faculty, teachers committed to student learning, and teachers having a sense of pride in the school (Baughman, 1996).

Flow refers to using a set of developed skills up to the limit of their ability, but not beyond (Martin, 2011).

High-Stakes Tests are standardized measures of assessment which determine the extent of the local schools success in preparing students for their futures (Weller & Weller, 1998).
Morale is “a school environment where faculty perceives a collective sense of friendliness, openness and trust” (Baughman, 1996).

Sense of Community provides the feeling of belonging to a shared psychological sense of coherence at a school. Members are connected by beliefs, feelings, and relationships (Belenardo, 2001).

Supportive Principal Behavior is concerned with both social and task achievement, motivates teachers by using constructive feedback and is a positive role model for teachers (Baughman, 1996).

Strategic Vision connects the reality of the present to the possibilities of the future in a unique way that is appropriate for the organization and its leader (Manasse, 1985).
Chapter II – Review of Literature

I have divided the literature into three topics: leadership, supporting low cost initiatives, and high-stakes testing. Each of these areas addresses a piece of my research question. All of this information is centered on the principal and what can be done to increase staff morale.

Leadership

Principal behaviors.

Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) reviewed interviews and stories concerning the principal’s role during their first years teaching and compiled the data from five novice teachers. They connected the data in a chain of concepts. At each level of the chain specific questions were asked. The chain focused on elements of the induction program, indicators of effectiveness, and specific descriptors of the indicator. A principal’s interactions may be different than interactions with experienced teachers because of the difference in power between the teachers and principal. The new teacher focuses on pleasing the principal to continue their employment. The new teachers reports of interactions with the principal focus on meeting personal needs even when the principal focuses on developing and implementing professional development for all teachers. The new teacher may be too absorbed in trying to establish feelings of effectiveness, positive self-esteem and stress management to pay close attention to the principal’s efforts to improve classroom instruction (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010).

School leaders should formally assess school climate. Keiser and Schulte (2009) found that without an accurate measure, assumptions can lead to an imprecise picture of school climate. Fourth-grade and fifth-grade students and their teachers were given a survey in one urban and one suburban school. Students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the school climate did not match and there were statistically significant discrepancies in the urban school (Keiser & Schulte, 2009).
Data were gathered from a small group and only included one urban and one suburban school. While making efforts to increase staff morale a principal needs to be aware of the teachers’ perceptions and not just base information what he or she believes should be making a difference and an impact.

Gilrane, Roberts and Russel (2008) evaluated professional development activities to report the success of a grant to teach all students to read. Teachers and principals were observed and interviewed in one school. When introducing new programs and initiatives teachers felt it was important for principals to participate in the professional development and work alongside the teachers to implement the change. Principals also reported being more aware of the problems in the classrooms, having more respect for the teachers and feeling like they were more a part of what was going on (Gilrane, Roberts, & Russell, 2008). Principals may have the ability to increase staff morale by being involved in professional development and working alongside the teachers.

Louis, Febey, and Schroeder (2005) used interviews and case studies conducted at a small number of schools in three states. Districts were selected on the basis of the previous knowledge of researchers according to the criteria supplied by the research staff. One-hour interviews were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended questions. Data were analyzed using a constant comparative method. Each author completed a concept map and then the authors held a daylong meeting where the maps were compared and condensed. Data were reanalyzed according to sense-making. It was determined that principals assist teachers in making sense of bureaucratic policies. A strong school leader has the ability to help the school work through the fear of doing something differently and to assist them in working cooperatively to meet the new accountability standards. When standards-based reform is
accepted by the principal, teachers appear to be more willing to take on the new challenge (Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005). A principal who is able to help teachers make sense of new policies and help them meet the new requirements will help improve staff morale.

In the survey completed by middle school students, parents and teachers who explored the how the school organization plays a role in producing a sense of community, involving parents in their children’s education and leadership characteristics of the principal as reported by teachers, Belenardo (2001) established a strong correlation between the principal’s leadership style and school community. Principal’s structural leadership style had the greatest effect on a positive school community. However, political and symbolic styles of leadership also had significant correlations. Principals that have the ability to assign responsibilities, identify necessary organization structures, set goals and manage the school’s resources may have the greatest impact on creating a positive school community.

Humor in the workplace may impact employee satisfaction and morale. Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2009) determined that the use of humor by leaders can have positive or negative effects. The effectiveness of humor is dependent upon the other leadership qualities of the leader. Gender of the leader and the subordinates also affects the effectiveness of humor in the workplace. Training of leaders to understand the right use of humor in the workplace may be a tool to open communication in the workplace. The participants of this study were randomly selected from California high schools. Confidential questionnaires addressing organization effectiveness were sent to 491 principals within the state education system. The response rate was 45 percent. Confidential questionnaires were then sent to 1,060 department lead teachers after the principal confidentially responded. The teachers’ questionnaire rated the principals’ leadership behaviors and job-relevant perceptions of the teachers. Thirty-four percent of the
teachers returned the questionnaire. The intended level of analysis was dyadic; therefore, the researchers randomly selected 179 teachers for 179 principals with complete data available. The teachers were selected using a table of random numbers. The data were analyzed using three different equations with years teaching and teacher job satisfaction as the controls. Same-gender leader-follower pairs reported higher levels of humor relative to different-gender pairs. Leader humor and leader behavior do not fully account for follower performance. When low humor was noted along with low integrity or low contingent reward, lower performance was noted. It was also noted in the study that leaders who made less use of humor in combination with low contingent reward had lower performance. Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2009) concluded that humor should have a positive main-effect on performance as long as it is not tied to contingent rewards. The use of humor may open communication between leaders and followers. This could potentially increase performance. Principals in schools do not have access to extra money and need to rely on other means to increase staff morale. Principals can use social and personal means to motivate teachers. Including training for principals to increase the use of humor in the workplace may be a useful tool when trying to increase staff morale. Due to the findings about gender differences, a principal may need to take this into account as they attempt to use humor in the workplace.

Rodriguez (2010) felt the most important part of her job as a principal was to model, assist, motivate, empower and encourage everyone to reach their fullest potential. By operating as an agent for change and using collaboration, team effort and shared responsibility she was able to assist teachers and create a positive school climate. Poor relationships with peers and superiors can lead to dissatisfaction. Authoritarian principals can also lead to teacher dissatisfaction and hostility among the staff. Teacher satisfaction is affected positively by
achievement, recognition, and autonomy. Sara and Hamadeh (1985) completed a study in twenty randomly selected Lebanese public and private schools. Lebanese was selected because the leadership style is traditionally more authoritarian than the United States. The principal, three male teachers and three female teachers were randomly chosen from each school. Principals were given the California F-Scale that included 19 statements of opinion with which subjects may agree or disagree. Teachers were given a self-monitoring scale that included 20 true-false items. Data were analyzed and five of the principal’s surveys closest to the mean were dropped. The study was left with 15 principals and 90 teachers. Two-way analysis was used to determine the effects of the variables. The study did not support the hypothesis that principal authoritarianism increases self monitoring behavior by teachers. Teachers did not show an increased need for situational appropriateness when pressure in the workplace was increased. The way males and females responded to authoritarian principals was opposite of studies completed in the United States. The males were more likely to increase self monitoring behavior while the women were less likely to increase self monitoring behavior. In the United States women are more likely to increase self monitoring behavior when working under an authoritarian principal. Sara and Hamadeh cautioned that the results of their study may be situational to Lebanon. When working to increase staff morale, a principal should avoid an authoritarian leadership style.

Reyes and Hoyle (1992) found that teachers with more experience had greater satisfaction with principal communication. They sent surveys to 600 teachers in 20 randomly selected schools. The survey included 16 items to measure teachers’ total satisfaction with their principal’s communication. The principals in all 20 schools were male. There were no statistically significant differences in regards to gender. However, there were significant
discrepancies when comparing different age groups. Greater levels of satisfaction in regards to communication were reported with increasing age. Reyes and Hoyle (1992) recommended that principals make a conscious effort to include new teachers in the same conversations as experienced teachers. Principals also need to make sure younger teachers feel like their ideas and contributions are valued (Reyes & Hoyle, 1992).

*Creating a vision.*

Leadership involves making change in an organization. The leader must be able to recognize where the organization is and be able to see where the organization could be. Then the leader must be able to implement a plan to move the organization in the direction of the vision. Manasse (1985) described the ability to connect where the school is at to where the school could be as strategic vision. In order to make change happen a leader needs to have a well developed strategic vision and then use the vision when making decisions regarding the organization. Maintaining the shared vision with everyone working together will play a role in increasing staff morale. School improvement plans have become a major driving force in today’s schools. It is important to include components in the school improvement plan to help boost morale and maintain teacher satisfaction. High morale and a positive school climate are important to create an effective school (McDonnell, 1985).

Shared values, commitment, a feeling of belonging, caring, interdependence, and regular contact all lead to a sense of school community (Belenardo, 2001). Based on these values Belenardo administered a survey to parents and teachers of nine middle schools. Parents and teachers completed a parallel survey to report their sense of community. The survey was used to evaluate a program to increase parental involvement in the second year. Principals can focus on these areas to help build a more positive school climate. Shared values occur when all members
of the school are working toward the same vision. Administrators can work with teachers to develop a shared vision and to support the vision when making decisions that affect the school. Commitment can be measured by the level of participation in events outside of the normal school day. Principals can recognize the time teachers spend outside of the school day and reward them for their efforts and commitment to the school and surrounding community.

Having a strong feeling of belonging also leads to a sense of school community. Teachers need to feel like they belong with their colleagues. Feelings of belonging are created by recognizing positive performance, school traditions and working towards common goals. Interdependence also affects the sense of school community. Teachers work together to coordinate curriculum and solve problems. Working together provides a supportive framework. Regular contact occurs when all members of the community have opportunities to meet and communicate. Opportunities are provided for teachers to interact with each other, develop relationships and celebrate accomplishments. Principals can set up times and provide opportunities for teachers to gather together in formal and informal settings (Belenardo, 2001). Principals need to recognize the importance building a strong school community and the relationship between sense of community and staff morale. There will be many benefits to the entire school community if the principal spends time and energy to develop a team of teachers that work together regularly.

*Teachers as Leaders*

Anderson (2008) completed a case study of one rural school with a principal and five teachers to evaluate teachers in leadership roles. Each person was extensively interviewed and their responses were recorded. The case study on one school was taken from a larger study. Teachers were involved in areas they found meaningful and shared decision making was utilized
when decisions needed to be made. The principal enlisted the teacher leaders to assist with decision making. Teacher leaders were more accessible to staff and easier to relate to other teachers. Utilizing teacher leaders can help staff feel more connected, allow them to participate in decisions about the school and help to build a cooperative workplace environment. Principals can establish strong teacher leadership groups within larger schools to increase staff morale.

Mentoring teachers during their first year has proven to help reduce turnover. This may be a more cost effective way to increase morale by building relationships with peers and reducing turnover (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Principals can establish mentoring programs and allow time for mentors and mentees to work together.

Increasing teacher autonomy is another way to lower levels of stress and increase teacher job satisfaction. Some ways to increase teacher autonomy are to allow teachers to choose textbooks, classroom discipline and grading policies. When teachers feel like they do not have control in the classroom they are more likely to feel ineffective. Principals are also able to increase teacher satisfaction by directly dealing with disruptive and difficult students by removing or punishing the student (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Richardson (2003) concluded that leadership skills are learned skills and can be taught. The study was done with 600 graduates of an Educational Leadership program. Additional questions were included for participants that remained as teachers for three years after completing the program. Teachers reported they would recommend the program to teachers that do not plan on becoming administrators. Teachers should be developed as leaders to better enable them to provide meaningful and substantial contributions to the school. Developing leadership skills allows teachers to improve communication, decision-making and problem-solving skills. A survey using quantitative and qualitative methods was used to gather
information from 170 graduates of an Educational Leadership program. Teachers reported feeling more confident and knowledgeable and were better prepared to face the daily challenges at work.

Roby (2009) completed a study administered a survey to 70 graduate students teaching in rural, suburban and city elementary schools in Ohio to determine the level of contribution of teachers in the workplace. Teachers that contributed frequently or were influential consistently had a higher morale than those that were followers and did not contribute (Roby 2009). Principals can work to increase opportunities to allow teachers to contribute to the school in positive ways. Teachers taking graduate classes and membership in professional organizations can also lead to greater satisfaction (Kelly, 2004). Principals may also need to provide training to teachers to help teachers feel more confident in their ability to be meaningful contributors to the school. When principals’ are working to increase staff morale they can focus on giving teachers meaningful opportunities to contribute to the school and to learn how to be meaningful contributors.

Supporting Low Cost Initiatives

Raising teachers’ salaries does not seem to have long term effects on staff morale and attrition (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). This is a positive for schools in today’s financial crisis. Baughman (1996) reported the only variable that played a major role in predicting the satisfaction of teachers was the school climate. Teachers do not gain satisfaction by gaining more power and money within the school. They gain satisfaction from cooperative efforts with the staff, an emphasis on academics, and from students learning. The principal needs to focus on creating a work environment that is open, collaborative and trusting (Baughman, 1996).
The process of creating an environment where teachers are more satisfied does not need to be expensive. Baughman (1996) collected data from New York State public school secondary teachers using a confidential questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by combining and omitting questions from three extensively field tested tools. The questionnaire was sent to 600 teachers and a total of 376 teachers responded from 240 different schools. Factors that did not significantly influence teacher job satisfaction were teacher age, salary, gender, level of education and years of experience. By omitting questions the validity of the instruments may have been affected when questions were removed. Principals need to pay attention to a few basic steps in order to increase teacher satisfaction in the workplace. The five factors from Baughman’s (1996) study with the strongest links to teacher job satisfaction were engaged teacher behavior, supportive principal behavior, academic emphasis, frustrated teacher behavior and morale. These five factors explained 61% of the variance in job satisfaction. The factors which contributed the most to job satisfaction were engaged teacher and supportive principal behavior. Engaged teacher behavior contributed 36% to the variance of job satisfaction and exists when there are supportive staff, friendship and trust among faculty, teachers are committed to student learning, and teachers have a sense of pride in their building. Supportive principal behavior contributed 14% of the variance in job satisfaction. A supportive principal is concerned with both social and task achievement, motivates teachers by using constructive feedback and is a positive role model for teachers. It is important for the principal to focus on both the achievement and social needs in the school. Teachers feel satisfied when students learn. Non-teaching duties and politics in the school take away from teacher job satisfaction. The principal should work to limit additional duties and help create a common purpose for the school. When interacting with faculty the principal needs focus on building trust and respect, being genuine
and keeping promises. Principals can use the information from Baughman’s (1996) research to establish a school environment focused on using the principles found to increase teacher job satisfaction. By working to support teachers, engaging them in the school community, focusing on academics and reducing the frustration of teachers, a principal can improve staff morale.

The intrinsic motivation of teachers should be considered when developing a reward structure for teachers in public schools. The principal can recognize teachers publicly, give constructive feedback, and encourage peer recognition. To assist teachers with low job satisfaction policies and strategies need to be put in place to deal with the needs of teachers (Reyes, 1990). Changing beliefs and behaviors have the most reliable effects on increasing satisfaction. By expressing gratitude, being forgiving, creating and deepening relationships, being optimistic, entering a state of flow, being mindful and helping others teachers can increase their satisfaction (Martin, 2011). Principals can work to change beliefs and behaviors in the school community.

Martin (2011) reviewed research and identified three areas that can be fostered and developed to increase teacher satisfaction: flow, relationships, and helping others. Flow refers to using a developed set of skills up to the limit of their ability, but not beyond. School leaders can support teachers by allowing them to work on tasks that use their strengths and are challenging, but not frustrating. Relationships also contribute to job satisfaction. There are many different types of relationships in a school setting which contribute to job satisfactions (Martin, 2011). These relationships can be with colleagues, students, teachers in other districts, administrators, and support staff. Principals can help teachers establish positive relationships by establishing mentors for new teachers and by setting up collaborative groups of teachers. Teaching is a natural place to help others and this lends itself to increased job satisfaction. However, helping
too much can lead to burnout (Martin, 2011). Principals can help teachers find a balance when helping others. They can assist with classroom management to ensure students are learning to help themselves and principals can encourage teachers to participate in activities within the school and outside of the school which will help others outside of the classroom.

Reyes (1990) studied normative and utilitarian work orientations and their effects on teacher job satisfaction. Surveys were randomly sent to 150 teachers. Data were analyzed using tenure, age, gender and teaching experience. Post hoc analysis was used to review the level of normative work orientation and job satisfaction. He determined that teachers with higher normative work orientations expressed greater job satisfaction than those with low normative work orientation. This information can be used to support the use of symbolic rewards and move the focus away from materialistic rewards.

*High-Stakes Testing*

When teachers are able to see students’ test scores improve on high stakes tests, the teachers’ morale increases. Teachers feel a sense of pride when they can see their work in measurable ways (Weller & Weller, 1998). Principal leadership behaviors affect teachers’ sense of community. Weathers (2011) reviewed data from the National Center for Educational Statistic’s (NCES) School and Staffing Survey (SASS) administered during the 1999-2000 school year to establish the predictors of a sense of school community. The sample for this study was limited to public urban elementary school teachers. Analysis involved two series of staged multilevel regression models. High stakes testing does not have a negative effect on school community. State initiated accountability can bring a school community closer. Members of the school community work together to reach the performance goals developed by the state. The principal’s attitude toward the state accountability affects the impact on the school climate.
Principal’s actions to promote school climate have a small impact. However, teachers’ perceptions of principal behavior have a significant impact on the school climate (Weathers, 2011). Principals need to maintain a positive attitude toward change within a school system in order to lead the organization successfully. It is important for the teachers to see that the change initiatives are supported by the principal to maintain positive staff morale.

Teachers are highly motivated by subject matter and less by salary. Larger class sizes and lack of administrative support are also factors in creating a poor school climate. The average ability level of the students in a classroom can also have a negative effect on teacher satisfaction. Teachers measure their success based on the success of the students they are teaching. If a teacher has a classroom full of low performing students, the teacher can have low job satisfaction because the students are not performing well. The 1990-1991 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 1992 Teacher Follow-up Survey were used to collect data from the 4,761 teachers involved in the study (Kelly, 2004).

Leadership, supporting low cost initiatives and high-stakes testing are all involved in increasing staff morale in today’s schools. Research supports initiatives that are cost effective and using high-stakes testing to the schools advantage. Principals need to use leadership skills to develop relationships with teachers and to help teachers develop relationships with their peers. Principals’ attitudes and beliefs will have the greatest impact on increasing staff morale.
Chapter III - Results and Analysis Relative to Problem

Leadership

Principal behaviors and attitudes have the greatest impact on staff morale. A principal with strong leadership skills and the ability to develop a strong vision is able to create a much more positive work environment for teachers. Principals can train and use teachers as leaders. By giving teachers opportunities to contribute to the school community, especially in areas of the teacher’s strengths will also increase staff morale (Anderson, 2008; Belenardo, 2001; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Sara & Hamadeh, 1985). Researchers propose creating a vision to support change. The vision must be well developed and encourage the development of a school community that is committed, caring, cooperative and interdependent (Belenardo, 2001; Manasse, 1985).

Bickmore and Bickmore (2010), Reyes and Hoyle (1992), and Roby (2009) found a correlation between teacher satisfaction and principal communication. Principals that interacted with teachers and felt like they were contributing members of the school community felt more satisfied than those teachers that did not participate. Teachers who continue their education and do more professional development also demonstrate increased job satisfaction. Principals can provide professional development opportunities and encourage teachers to take classes.

Supporting Low-Cost Initiatives

Researchers agree that increasing teachers’ salaries will not have long term effects on increasing staff morale. In general teachers are not materialistic and are more motivated by intrinsic and social factors (Baughman, 1996; Kukla-Acevedo, 2006; Martin, 2011). Principals need to focus on establishing a cooperative, caring and supportive work environment. Principals also need to establish supportive relationships with teachers and provide opportunities for
teachers to build cooperative relationships with one another (Baughman, 1996; Martin, 2011). Teachers are highly motivated by student success and less motivated by power and money within the school. Increasing staff morale does not need to cost the district a great amount of money. The structure of the school needs to be reorganized and the principal’s attitudes and beliefs may also need to change in order to establish the type of environment necessary to increase staff morale.

*High-Stakes Testing*

Research supports the idea that high-stakes testing can work to increase staff morale. Teachers feel good about themselves when there are improvements in students’ test scores. Teachers also establish relationships, work cooperatively and feel like meaningful contributors when working together to develop plans to meet performance goals. The principal’s attitude toward the testing also has a strong impact on staff morale. The principal needs to maintain a positive attitude towards the changes and requirements (Kelly 2004; Weathers, 2011; Weller & Weller, 1998).
Chapter IV – Recommendations and Conclusions

Recommendations

Ultimately, staff morale falls on the shoulders of the principal. The morale in the school is a reflection of the leadership in place. Other members of the school community can do small things that will impact staff morale; however, without the principal’s support, attitudes and behaviors are not likely to have a lasting effect on staff morale. Even though most principals wear many hats and have many duties throughout the day, focusing on increasing staff morale will have major pay-offs for the school. Principals need to understand that the time invested in improving staff morale will come back to the school many times over. Being a principal is a bit like coaching. Teachers need advice and molding to change attitudes and beliefs. If the principal works in a way that includes the teachers in the decision making process, they will feel like they are part of the team. Creating a strong team will help increase staff morale by connecting teachers to their peers. Working cooperatively and forming meaningful relationships within the school community increases teachers’ job satisfaction. Principals also need to create a school environment that supports teachers so they can do their job. Removing some of the external stressors and job duties that are not related to teaching is one way a principal can increase staff morale. The principal should also become a buffer against the new governmental mandates. Principals need to have a positive attitude regarding the changes which will help the teachers greet the challenge with a more positive attitude. When a new mandate is received by the school, the principal should develop a plan to address and meet the mandate. The principal should not complain about the mandate in front of teachers and should demonstrate a positive attitude toward the change. The staff will be more likely to accept this and the school climate will be more positive.
The principal needs to recognize that the teachers are working on the front line and when assistance is needed the principal needs to be supportive. Principals can provide support by dealing with behavior concerns in a classroom and by standing behind teachers when issues arise. When there are issues between parents, students and teachers the principal should publicly show support for teachers. If there is an issue that needs to be addressed with the teacher, it is important to deal with that issue behind closed doors. The principal should support the teacher in regards to discipline issues as well. If a student is removed from the classroom by the teacher, the principal should address the student and the behavior concerns of the teacher. The student should have consequences for the poor behavior.

Principals should be involved in professional development and new initiatives brought into the school. This will help the principal feel like they are part of the change and it will allow the teachers to see that the principal is supporting the change. It is essential for a principal to be part of the team. The principal needs to be an active participant rather than a passive onlooker. The principal also needs to make sure they are enlisting participation from the teachers. Teachers that feel like they are meaningful contributors to the school have increased job satisfaction. The principal can include teachers by creating small groups of teachers to review programs and recommend changes for the school. The principal can also have discussions with the staff as a whole group to solicit ideas and feelings about what is happening in the school. It is not necessary for the principal to do everything the staff suggests; however, if the staff feels like they have a voice and an opportunity for it to be heard the teachers will have increased job satisfaction.

Another way to increase staff morale is to encourage teacher autonomy. To increase teacher autonomy a principal can give teachers more control of what is happening in the
As long as the teachers are following the state mandated requirements, the principal can give them control of what they teach, when they teach and how they teach. Principals still need to be aware of what is going on in each classroom and they need to provide guidance to the teachers.

Principals need to be trained to be leaders in schools. Many principals do not have a natural understanding of staff morale and the ability to increase it. Increasing staff morale does not happen incidentally. Principals need to make conscious decisions based on a shared vision for the school, encourage and provide opportunities for teachers to form relationships and to support teachers work in the classroom.

**Areas for Further Research**

Much of the research about job satisfaction is more than 20 years old. Some of these studies may not be replicated in today’s schools with the increased bureaucratic expectations and dire condition of school finance and national economy. Surveying teachers in today’s rural, urban and suburban schools to determine what is motivating to teachers today would be beneficial to determine what is motivating for today’s teachers. Questions regarding the impacts of increased class size and decreased school funding would also provide valuable information to increasing teacher job satisfaction and staff morale. Data needs to be reviewed by age, gender, grade level taught and location of the school.

**Summary and Conclusion**

A positive school climate and teacher job satisfaction both of which lead to increased staff morale are important pieces of today’s schools. There are many additional stressors which include larger class sizes, more behavior challenges and decreased funding and resources in the classroom that impact a positive school climate and teacher job satisfaction. It is important for
school leaders to make a concerted effort to improve the school climate and teacher job satisfaction. These factors not only help the teachers but they will also help the students by encouraging teachers to work cooperatively to provide better learning experiences, improve the school environment so it will be more positive for all members, and to increase test scores. Principal’s will also have a better work environment to work in and should find the time spent improving staff morale is returned to them multiple times by having teachers willing to put in extra time and energy to make the school better. School leaders need to focus on positive interactions with staff, providing teachers with autonomy, encouraging collegial relationships, protecting teachers from factors that interfere with the delivery of instruction.
References


