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School Culture, School Climate, and the Role of the Principal

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SCHOOL CULTURE, SCHOOL CLIMATE, AND
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

by

FELECIA SPICER

Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to determine to what degree the Vision Project's implementation impacted school climate and student achievement in high implementation districts. Specifically, this study examined what principals do that impacts or determines the climate of a school, in an effort to establish action steps for school principals to follow to create a positive school climate. The purpose was to describe and interpret the actions of principals from their own view and the perspective of those around them. This research looked at two schools in two different school districts to determine principal and teacher perceptions in regards to what a leader does to develop and maintain a positive school climate. That is, how is a positive learning environment created where teachers feel confident in their work? A general inductive approach was chosen to focus on the realities of the participants within the school districts in order to understand their perceptions of what the principal does to impact the climate in a school. An instrumental study design allowed for an in-depth look at the Vision Project's overall impact on a school implementing the recommendations with fidelity with a specific focus on school culture, school climate, and the role of the principal.

INDEX WORDS: School Culture, School Climate, Georgia Vision Project, Education Policy

SCHOOL CULTURE, SCHOOL CLIMATE, AND
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

By

FELECIA SPICER

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

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in

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the College of Education and Human Development

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation work to my loving family. To my older brother, Anthony, who takes credit for all of my accomplishments; making sure I had a "challenge" everyday of my childhood was your way of making sure I reached my fullest potential. To my younger brother, Craig, who always believes in me no matter where I am in my life. Thank you for categorizing me with some of your childhood heroes (inside joke). To my mom who shared with me a bit of her creativeness and a lot of her patience, thank you for loving me even when I was not so loveable. Your confidence in me carried me through the first two years of this process. Losing you could have taken that confidence away, but my actual strength to make it to the finish line comes from your belief (and I laugh thinking of you saying this) that this is probably easy for me because you know I can do anything I put my mind to. To my darling daughter, Sadie Jane, I am forever grateful for your editing expertise. Thank you for carrying me gently out of the forest of semi-colons and for pretending you were interested in the subject of my work. *I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always…* To my precious son, Andrew, thank you for encouraging me always, for making me laugh (and laughing at me), and for being the happy, willing recipient of some of my more interesting teaching strategies. *Throw me three things Theodore….*

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one else could and because you believe in me so powerfully, I can believe in myself. Thank you for being my best friend and for being the best husband.

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1 THE INTERGRATION OF SCHOOL CULTURE,

SCHOOL CLIMATE, AND LEADERSHIP

This literature review provides a working definition of school climate, along with

an understanding of how influential the role of the principal is in supporting a positive

school climate. Background knowledge on leadership style, that is, how teachers perceive

leadership style further explicates the necessity of vision, competence and an authentic

desire to serve for those who would become principals.

Guiding Questions

Principals interact with teachers and students as instructional mentors, while also

making sure that the school is physically and emotionally safe (Moolenaar, Daly &

Sleegers, 2010; Sparks, 2011). Having a process and procedure for creating a positive

school climate is a vehicle for principals to motivate teachers and students (Louis,

Wahlstrom, Leithwood, Anderson & Educational Research, 2010; Nor & Roslan, 2009).

This dissertation includes two chapters. The first chapter includes an in depth look at the

literature to provide a context for the findings in chapter two. The literature review

defines school climate. It recaptures previous studies that define and describe principal

leadership and leadership styles. Chapter one highlights teacher perceptions of what the

principal does to influence school climate vs. what principals actually do. It emphasizes

the importance of positive relationships, the importance of support for student learning,

the need for community involvement, and the significance of a positive workplace

environment. Chapter two presents the results of the data collected from interview

sessions with district office personal, school principals, and teacher leaders from each

district. The transcribed interviews were examined to determine trends and differences

between the two chosen schools in the actions of the principals in developing and

sustaining a positive school climate. Guided research questions are as follows:

1. How have the internal contexts, coupled with the implementation of the Vision

Project, impacted learning and leadership in the school?

2. What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted

learning in the school?

3. How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build the capacity of

self and others in the school?

4. What does the principal do to impact the culture, climate, and organizational

efficacy in the school, considering each of these four areas: support for learning,

stakeholder engagement, collegiality, and principal leadership?

Introduction.

Principals influence their staff and students; their perceptions change based on

whether or not the staff and students perceive their leaders' actions as competent

(Grobler, 2012), and as someone who embraces the power of the relationships among the

students and adults in the building (O'Malley, Meagan, Voight, Renshaw & Fklund,

2015). This literature review highlights a working definition of school climate, the

importance of principal influence, the necessity of developing a positive climate within a

school, creating a personal leadership style conducive to leading a school, teacher

perceptions of principal influence on school climate, the actions that principals take to

effect school climate, and conclude with gaps in the literature requiring further study.

When the Mormon Tabernacle Choir belts out their first song of the season, the

sound is not typical, but truly exceptional! Recently, researchers at the University of

Gothenburg in Sweden strapped heart rate monitors to members of a choir as they began

an intricate performance. The research team was astounded at how quickly the singers' heart rates began to beat at exactly the same rate. Although the monitors initially generated a set of serrated lines, as the choir sang, those lines quickly became synchronized. Bjorn Vickhoff, a member of the research team noted that suddenly there were no lone performers; the team and all of the choir participants experienced the beauty of feeling significant (Haensch, 2013). This moment of sound and synchronization is not an accident. It may occur through strong and highly effective leadership at its helm. The director's leadership style gives the impression of being highly effective perhaps because influence, paired with competency, and talent perceived by the choir members (Grobler, 2012; Haensch, 2013). Broin & New (2012) assent to this theory and include high expectations with in-depth, nurturing support as the backbone to every leadership decision made.

Successful leadership requires a leader who can unify, create harmony, and produce effective results (Weller & Hartley, 2012; Rajbhandari, 2012; Wilson-Fleming & Wilson-Younger, 2012). In a school, in which there is a culture of unity and a shared vision that produces harmony and effective results, there is *beautiful music* (Herbert, 2011), and successful leadership of a school requires nothing less (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). A principal who can bring the faculty and staff together, articulate a vision and reinforce that vision until others are inspired to embrace it achieves leadership success thereby allowing the students to achieve greater academic fulfillment (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Herbert, 2011; Mosley, Boscardin, & Wells, 2014). A school is perceived to be successful by its teachers and students when the principal is focused on creating a climate conducive to that success (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). In fact, Gülşen & Gülenay (2014), found that because the product of a school is actually people, the concept of

climate has become increasingly integral in the business of education. If this is indeed true, how does a principal create such a climate and how impactful are the principal's actions and the teachers' perceptions of those actions toward creating that climate?

Being a school leader is not the same as in years past (Grobler, 2012). One study highlighted perceived changes in recent years as an increase in administrative demands, a greater emphasis on assessment of performance and a greater push toward professional learning communities where the principal is actually leading instructionally (State of School Leadership, 2005). Principals are expected to work based on the unique culture and values within their schools which means there is a greater emphasis on building relationships with all school stakeholders (Sergiovanni, 2000). However, leadership training has not kept up with the changing times (Copland & Honig 2010). There is widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes, which requires trained, committed, and highly effective principals (Bush, 2009; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, & Quraishi 2014). Leadership encompasses many elements that are often conflicting or discursive (Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens & Sleegers, 2012). Principals must be able to balance all of those elements while being aware of what impacts the climate of a school in order to meet demands and maximize outcomes (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; ten Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Sleegers, 2012). The purposes of this study are to determine what principals do that influences school climate, and to describe teacher perceptions of what principals do as it affects school climate.

In previous research, surveys have been used to purvey the meaning of a positive school climate (Freiberg, 1998; Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002; Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2009; Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci & Cagatay, 2012). While

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the wording varies, the basic areas of measure rarely change (NASSP, 2005; Gruenert, 2005; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002). The major goal of the Georgia Vision Project was to determine what needs to be in place in all schools in order for all children to receive an equitable education and one of the standards included in the GVP focuses on school climate (Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia Superintendents Association, 2010). According to the literature, the six factors identified as a necessity for a positive climate most often include: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnerships (Drago-Severson, 2012; Gruenert, 2005; Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia Superintendents Association, 2010). These six factors parallel nicely with the guiding principals of the eighth standard of the Georgia Vision Project (GVP) with regard to Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy (GSBA, 2009). For example, collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, and collegial support all intertwine with standard 8.5 of the GVP (see Appendix) in that each of these areas support the development of teachers self efficacy and their comfort in the incorporation of innovative teaching that inevitably requires some risk taking (Le Fevre, D. M., 2014). The GVP also recommends a school climate of cultural competency, which involves ongoing (not a one-time occurrence each school year), school-wide professional development (Ryan & Leadley, 2015). This not only reflects a school's unity of purpose, but it also parallels with standard 8.1 of the GVP where there is an emphasis on developing a climate of respect and encouragement through a supportive and safe learning environment (A Vision For Public Education Equity and Excellence. GSBA, 2009). Finally, the 2005 NASSP Bulletin highlights the need for learning partnerships to enhance a school's culture and climate which is imbedded into all seven standards of the

GVP. It coincides with standard seven (GVP) where there is a recommendation that the school serve as the center of the community (GSBA, 2009).

Review

In developing a working definition of climate for this study the utilization of previous research, and of the standards identified in the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education provide both specific direction for leaders and meaningful insight to the Georgia Vision Project. The awareness of the GVP may be the first step in creating a positive school climate, and an understanding as to how that climate translates into students receiving the greatest opportunity for educational success (GSBA, 2009). For the purpose of this review, "school climate" refers to the stakeholder's (students, teachers, and parents) perceptions (Lindahl, 2001) in regards to the leadership of the organization in cooperation with the working environment, and the formal and informal organization of the school (Hoy & Miskel, 2010), whereas "school culture" places more focus on embracing the beliefs and values reflective of the common behaviors that characterize the organization by setting the standards for behavior (Stolp & Smith, 1995; Gülşen, & Gülenay, 2014) within the school. Drago-Severson (2012) reports that it takes a long period of time to change a school's culture, while school climate is more "amenable to influence and change" (p. 6).

Passion, commitment, motivation and the idea of the leader's impact (as perceived by stakeholders) on climate weave seamlessly throughout the literature (Dunn & Harris, 1998; Lencioni, 2006; Bush, 2009; Maxwell, 2011; Drago-Severson, 2012; Gülşen, & Gülenay, 2014), and there appears to be some evidence supporting a correlation between how a school "feels", teacher efficacy, and how the children in the school perform academically (Bulach, Lunnenberg, & Potter, 2011). Konakli (2014),

defines principal influence as "the ability to affect another's attitudes, beliefs or behaviors – seen only in its effect – without using coercion or formal position, and in a way that influencers believe that they are acting in their own best interests" (p. 181). A school principal must create a leadership style that truly influences and inspires staff members in order to build and sustain a successful school (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Kilinc, 2012). Authenticity in day-to-day actions, possessing educational leadership skills, and having the ability to build trust among the staff, students and community paves the way for a principal to be influential and inspirational (Bonnici, 2011, Karakos, 2008).

School climate.

The characteristics of a school affect student behavior and academic achievement (Bulach, Lunnenberg, & Potter, 2011; Kallestad, 2010). In order to determine the characteristics that affect student behavior and academic achievement, a working definition of climate is critical. The word *climate* magically evokes the question, "How does it feel?" In a positive climate, there may not be a lot of discussion about how the school feels; however, Loukas, Suzuki & Horton (2006) believe "a positive school climate buffers the negative effects of self-criticism" (p. 492). So, when the climate is positive, the *less than positive* events, interactions, and expectations are blurred and less significant in determining how comfortable a school actually feels and how beneficial it is to student learning (Loukas, Suzuki & Horton, 2006). The danger in not including the attributes of a positive climate in regular discussion and nurturing a climate that is most conducive to learning is that it can become toxic before there is time to prevent it (Gruenert, 2006). Indeed, it is much like that pair of slacks that fit last spring. They were not too small until the owner tried to put them on this spring. Freiberg (1998) concurs, "Much like the air we breathe, school climate is ignored until it becomes foul" (p. 22). A

2010 study out of the University of North Carolina discovered that failing to nurture positivity in a school is the best way to ensure lower student achievement (Moller, Mickelson, Stearns, Bottia, Banerjee, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2011).

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform (2009), found "Establishing a common understanding about the definition of school climate among building staff is the first step in identifying the extent to which the school climate is positive and conducive to learning. The next critical step is to assess the existing school climate and identify a plan of action" (p. 2). If the school climate evokes a positive spirit, then students and teachers tend to fall in love with the school (Freiberg and Stein, 1999), and students are ready to learn because they feel valued and feed off of the positive emotions of the staff (Cobb, 2014). Once a definition is in place, work toward a positive school climate can begin (TNTP, 2012).

The National School Climate Council (2014) defines school climate by characterizing school life and determining the quality of the school atmosphere. The council offers the inclusion of the following dimensions in determining school climate: rules and norms, physical security, social-emotional security, support for learning, social and civic learning, respect for diversity, social support for adults, social support for students, school connectedness and engagement, physical surroundings, and leadership. Each dimension includes major indicators with which to measure the school's climate ("School Climate", 2014). The significance of identifying these dimensions and helping principals to understand the significance lies in the fact that most principals do not have training in how to develop a positive school climate even though it is included in the standards for 43 states (Sparks, 2013). Shaping a school climate so that the vision of the

school can be achieved is what a good principal does (Spiro, 2013). Getting there requires a roadmap highlighting valid benchmarks to measure progress ("School Climate", 2014).

Loukas, Suzuki and Horton (2006), define climate as "the quality and frequency of interpersonal interactions, school climate is a multidimensional construct encompassing interpersonal, organizational and instructional dimensions" (p. 491). In 2010, climate was defined using W. K. Hoy's Organizational Climate Index which included four dimensions: principal leadership, teacher professionalism, the push for student achievement, and vulnerability to the community (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002, 2010).

And finally, the Georgia School Superintendent's Association Board of Directors established an Executive Committee in 2009, to identify key issues in education that allow for, or keep children from, an equitable and excellent education. One of the key issues (one of the critical educational system components) established is *Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy* (Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia Superintendents Association, 2010). The guiding principles, for the sake of definition, for this component include: trust and collegiality, organizational culture, effective leadership, engagement of all stakeholders, organizational change, innovation and purposeful change, high expectations for all, recognition of cultural differences, and a safe and orderly environment ("A Vision For Public Education Equity And Excellence, 2009").

As referenced above, there is no shortage of definitions when looking at identifying a school's climate. Each research team above presents attributes necessary for a positive school climate, and while the terminology is not exact, Hoy (2002), Loukas, Suzuki & Horton (2006), GSBA (2009), and Hughes & Pickeral (2013) agree on four areas of impact: 1) Support for Learning, 2) Stakeholder Engagement, 3) Collegiality,

and 4) Principal Leadership. Although each research team had a line item for learning support, engagement, and collegiality (expressed in different ways), each of those three attributes nestled nicely under the umbrella of the fourth, principal leadership.

In order to create a positive school climate, it is necessary to define exactly what one looks like. Breaking it down to four specific areas as mentioned above may provide a direct method for a school leader to follow in creating or sustaining a positive school climate. However, an essential dimension of school climate that school leaders must embrace is the power of the relationships between and among the adults and students in the school building all of which influence the character of a school and enhances the overall quality of school life. (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; O'Malley, Meagan, Voight, Renshaw, & Eklund, 2015).

Principal influence.

In reporting the differences in school climate between successful schools and unsuccessful schools, there is evidence that successful schools have a more positive culture and climate when positively influenced by school leadership (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013). Principals who can build relationships with teachers and interact with all staff members hold the central elements for creating a positive school climate (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas 2004). Adeogun and Olisaemeka (2011) found that to be influential, "Leaders must be consummate relationship builders within groups, especially with people different from themselves. Principals should lead by example and show the same to teachers" (p. 555). When they do lead by example and work to build trust and, shared values, and a shared vision, relationships improve and teachers are more satisfied with their jobs (Singh, K., & Billingsley, 1998; Beauchamp & Parsons, 2012; Herbert, 2011; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Edgerson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006).

Studies have also shown the opposite; in that inconsistent behavior, lack of trust, and a weak and non-supportive inclination from the principal produces a negative school climate (Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Lindahl, 2001).

Principals are a powerful presence. Their influence impacts teachers as well as students. Manthey (2006) noted "When teachers believe they can positively affect student achievement, schools may be able to succeed when it had been thought impossible" (p. 26). A teacher's belief in self is dependent upon the school leader's willingness to provide mastery experiences (Manthey, 2006). Sixteen independent schools in the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C. were examined to determine whether or not the principal's self-efficacy was related to teachers' self-efficacy. Principals were given the Principal Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, 2004), and the teachers completed the Collective Efficacy Scale-Short Form (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk, 2000). Teachers in smaller schools who ranked their principal high in self-efficacy were also found to have a strong sense of self-efficacy, and reported to have a positive relationship with their principals (Autry, 2010). This is especially true when the principal serves as an instructional leader (Toll, 2010; Stone, 2009). When relationships between school principals (serving as instructional leaders) and overall teacher self-efficacy were examined in 328 teachers in primary schools in Ankara, instructional leadership had a significant and positive impact on teacher self-efficacy (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Kilinc, 2012). Student achievement exists in most schools, and teachers can be intrinsically "filled" when working with students to help them achieve (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk, 2000). However, teachers are more effective when there is a strong level of trust with their principal; trust in a school principal increases when the level of perceived authenticity increases (School Climate, 2014; Busman, 1992).

The idea of the power of a principal's influence can be quite intimidating especially since the direct influence on teachers immediately allows for the indirect, but impactful, influence on students (Herbert, 2011). Part of the educational leadership team at Prairie View A & M University found that teacher perception of their principal in regards to their level of influence is huge, but can be maximized when the principal attends to very basic needs such as providing planning time, having adequate space, and allowing for shared leadership (Edgerson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006). When these basic needs are attended to and the teacher can focus on student learning, students participate, learn, and obey classroom rules and procedures (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Research supports that the direct influence teachers have on student work is a result of the principal's direct influence on teachers and how they perceive themselves as educators; thus principals' indirect influence has a substantial effect on student engagement and achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Leithwood & Janzi, 2000; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

Gulsen & Gulenay (2014) completed a study in one of Turkey's common high schools (no entrance exam required) and found a positive correlation between a school's leader and school climate. Furthermore, there is agreement that school climate is one of the factors affecting student success in schools (Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Guramatunhu-Mudiwa, Scherz, Day, 2013). Gulsen & Gulenay (2014) conclude, "The leadership of the principal is the key factor in the formation of school climate" (p. 96).

Importance of developing a positive climate within the school.

John Maxwell, a businessman, author and motivational speaker, found that paying attention to the climate of any organization is the only way to achieve success in that

organization; as a matter of fact, failing to attend to the climate and culture can be tragic (1998). The Coca-Cola Company brought in over 8.5 billion dollars last year, having a net worth of over 90 billion dollars. The company stands by the assertion that they not only have a great product, they have a great product because they provide a great place for their employees to work (Coca-Cola Company, 2015) which is directly related to their company success. Georgia Power, A Southern Company, credits their success to employee and customer satisfaction. Their mission boasts,

At Georgia Power, our company culture is a reflection of our Southern Style: unquestionable trust, superior performance and total commitment. We believe that working together and treating one another with integrity is an important part of our commitment to our customers (Georgia Power, 2015).

Developing a positive climate ranks high and is studied often in the business world (Duffield, Roche, Blay & Stasa, 2011; Ching Gu, Hoffman, Qing, & Schniederjans, 2014; Cuma, 2011) providing evidence that a thriving, successful organization is only sustainable with a positive work environment. Developing a positive culture is equally important in schools. University Professors, MacNeil, Prater, & Busch (2009) agree, "paying attention to culture is the most important action that a leader can perform" (p. 76). Their study projected a laser-like focus on delineating poor school climate by first identifying the climate as measured by the ten Dimensions of the Organizational Health Inventory. The dimensions include: goal focus, communication adequacy, optimal power equalization, resource utilization, cohesiveness, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, adaptation and problem-solving adequacy (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009). Because the schools with the best school climate out-performed others in the area of *Goal focus and Adaptation,* it was made apparent that those attributes are

developed from the top down and therefore lay in the hands of the principal (MacNeil, Prater, Busch, 2009; Fink and Resnick, 2001).

In comparing the work of John Maxwell (2011) on the importance of a positive work climate, and two successful corporations who share that sentiment, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company and The Southern Company (Georgia Power), there are similarities that warrant attention in regards to this study and the findings of MacNeil, Prater, & Busch (2009) and their use of the Ten Dimensions of the Organizational Health Inventory. John Maxwell (2011) contends that developing a positive atmosphere and work climate is the only way to achieve success. The Coca-Cola Bottling Company's, focus on the importance of developing a positive climate and Georgia Power's commitment to employee and customer service satisfaction mirror the two highest scoring dimensions (Goal Focus and Adaptation) on the Organizational Health Inventory where schools were recognized as having a more positive climate (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). "Painting the big picture" (Three Ways to Create a Healthy Team Environment, para. 5) is one way that John Maxwell (2011) describes the importance of goal focus. Coca-Cola (2015) expresses this sentiment in the opening paragraph of the company's mission statement showing the significance of having a target for everyone in the organization to follow:

> Our vision serves as the framework for our Roadmap and guides every aspect of our business by describing what we need to accomplish in order to continue achieving sustainable, quality growth (Mission, para. 1).

> Georgia Power (2015) has an eleven-member management council committed to

making sure the company's focus is communicated and that there is a plan to continuously move forward toward success.

The second dimension associated with a positive climate in a work environment as described by McNeil, Prater & Busch (2009) is *Adaptation*. McNeil, Prater & Busch (2009) define adaptation as the "ability to tolerate stress and maintain stability while being responsive to the demands of the environment (p. 79). John Maxwell (2011) concurs expressing the importance of leaders being "environmental caretakers" (Minding the Environment, para. 1) and encouraging a spirit of working together to ease the demands of the work tasks. Coca-Cola (2015) commits to creating value in all of its employees creating an environment that "inspires moments of optimism and happiness" (Our Mission, para. 1). And Georgia Power touts their total commitment to working together and "treating each other with integrity". Georgia Power (2015) goes on to share that their commitment to their employees is also their gift to their customers (Our Culture, para. 1), which parallels the work of Hopson and Weldon (2013) and the impact that a positive school environment has on student achievement. According to Fisher & Carlyon (2015), there is a definite interconnectedness between the principal's role in developing positive relationships with staff members, a positive school climate, and how well students achieve.

Whether corporate business, the grocery store down the street, or a school building, climate is a major factor in achieving success (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Maxwell, 2011). Knowing the importance of creating and sustaining a healthy, positive school environment is a necessity (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). Freiberg (1998), assents "Much like the air we breathe, school climate is ignored until it becomes foul" (p. 22). He and others have highlighted the importance of students seeing themselves as the real citizens of the school and the ones that ultimately suffer if a positive climate does not

exist (Freiberg, 1998; Nor & Roslan, 2009; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White & Salovey, 2012; Klar & Brewer, 2013).

Student achievement is the ultimate goal of a school and studies show evidence that student achievement is directly related to the school's climate (Gruenert, 2005; Hinnant, O'Brien, & Ghazarian, 2009; James, 2007; Lindahl, 2001). Therefore, the importance of placing the need for establishing a positive school climate at the top of a leader's priority list (Louis, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., Leithwood, K., Anderson, S. E., & Educational Research, S., 2010) cannot be overstated. Dr. Steve Gruenert, (2005) studied extensively how the presence of a positive school climate impacts student achievement. His findings suggest that the more collaborative a staff is, the better the school climate and thus higher student achievement (Gruenert, 2005). He is careful to point out that the focus has to be on building a collaborative, positive climate and culture and not on student achievement. When schools narrow their focus to student achievement/test scores, rather than the climate, student achievement suffers (Gruenert, 2005). Gruenert (2005) further noted, "School culture and student achievement are not divergent issues for school leaders to consider; this is not an either/or decision" (p. 50). In essence, student achievement will not peak without an overall positive school climate (Leithwood & Mcadie, 2007).

Ronald Lindahl, an education professor at Alabama State University also focuses on the importance of developing a positive school climate when seeking school improvement. He emphasizes the need to assess the school culture and then determine the plan for school improvement (Lindahl, 2001). He agrees that school climate and student achievement are not mutually exclusive; however, when there are few shared values among the staff, a non-supportive leader, and few successes to glean from, school

improvement will not take place until the climate is changed (Lindahl, 2001). Three professors at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro set out to show that a school staff that shares the same values, beliefs and visions inadvertently strengthen collaboration which in turn enhances teaching strategies and teacher job satisfaction, allowing students to experience greater success (Strahan, Carlone, & Horn 2003). When stakeholders at one particular school were interviewed and given the opportunity to share their thoughts on the recent increase in student achievement, the results were not shocking. Strahan, Carlone, & Horn (2003) found "the visible outcomes of school improvement are often the result of deep-seated changes in school culture" (p. 206). Agreeing with these findings, Thompson & Crank (2010) state simply, "It (school climate) is important because it is intertwined with professional efficacy and student outcomes" (p. 3).

Studies supporting the effects of school climate are numerous. Studies range in focus from how to measure school climate (Freiberg, 1988; Lindahl, 2001; Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002; & Reeves, 2010) to the relationship between school climate and a principal's cultural competency (Moller, Mickelson, Stearns, Bottia, Banerjee, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, (2011), to the effects a positive school climate has on student achievement specifically (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci & Kilinc, 2012; and Handford & Leithwood, 2013) just to name a few. For the sake of this research, the focus is principal influence (Herbert, 2011; Beauchamp & Parsons, 2012; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Voight, Austin & Hanson, 2013); and the importance of developing a positive climate within the school (Freiberg, 1998; Maxwell, 1998; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Lindahl, 2001; Strahan, Carlone, & Horn, 2003; Gruenert, 2005; James, 2007; Hinnant, O'Brien, & Ghazarian, 2009; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Thompson &

Crank, 2010; Duffield, Roche, Blay & Stasa, 2011; Ching Gu, Hoffman, Qing, &

Schniederjans, 2014; Cuma, 2011). Realizing the significance of principal influence and

the principal's responsibility to develop a positive climate within the school, the leaders'

awareness of personal leadership style is more than a crucial element for school success,

it becomes an obligation (Kruger, Witziers & Sleegers, 2007; Burns & Martin, 2010;

Feen & Mixon, 2011; Hsiao & Chang, 2011; Drago-Severson, 2012; Leithwood & Sun,

2012; and Rajbhandari, 2012).

Leadership style.

Leadership style plays an important role in school climate (Hsiao & Chang, 2011;

Johnson, 2013). Hopson & Lawson (2011) identified and prioritized leadership

conditions necessary for improving or creating a positive school climate. "Creating a

positive school climate requires data-informed decision making, such that data about

students needs and organizational factors are used in improvement planning to create the

conditions for academic success" (Hopson & Lawson, 2011, p. 106). Okcu (2014)

investigated and found a relationship between a school administrator's leadership style

and their ability to create a positive school climate in a diverse school environment, and

Inandi, Tunc, & Gilic (2013) found a relationship between a school administrator's

leadership style and their willingness to make necessary changes within a school.

There are several identified leadership styles including transactional, driving,

autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, authoritative, and transformational (Inandi, Tune &

Gilic, 2013; Sahin, 2004; Leithwood, 1992; Rajbhandari, 2012; Goleman, 2014).

Creating a personal leadership style is not only possible, it is necessary; it requires a deep

sense of self-awareness, a willingness to know the components of leadership, and a desire

to practice those components (Bruce, n.d.). While leadership style is dependent upon

certain factors such as personality, cultural background, experiences, psychological health, and education (Inandi, Tunc & Gilic, 2013), it can be learned (Del, n.d.; Fisher & Carlyon, 2015; Sergiovanni, 1992; Rajbhandari, 2012).

The significance of leadership style has become increasingly important as the world considers the significance of a positive, quality education and its relationship to a highly skilled workforce (Bush, 2009). A positive, quality education is dependent upon a school's climate and the overall ambience of the school setting, which is directly related to the leadership style of the school principal (Bonnici, 2011). Most school principals lead innately without considering their leadership style; however, the perceptions of a school leader's style permeate through the school and community (Sergiovanni, 1992) making leadership style something to house in the forefront of the brain rather than buried in the subconscious. School leaders must lead with a style that sets a positive tone in order to provide a positive, quality education for students (Bonnici, 2011). Leadership style is tied directly to academic success because an effective leadership style builds trust which increases teacher efficacy (Hinnant, O'Brien, & Ghazarian, 2009). Teacher efficacy has a surprising list of positive effects on a school building, from improving student performance, to establishing a school climate that actually builds teacher commitment to the school (Brinson & Steiner, 2007).

Leadership style is not something limited to the building's bricks and mortar. One longitudinal study involving 320 schools throughout the United States set out to prove the impact that the principal had on student achievement when the principal worked to build positive, significant relationships with the entire school community (Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). It stands to reason that families feel better about their children's schools when the community has a positive perception of the school (Van Voorhis & Sheldon,

2004). Johnson (2013) shares, "Asking for help from the community sends a crucial message to the broader public. It demonstrates that school leaders value and respect what the community brings to the table" (p. 20). Since one of the most crucial attributes of effective leadership is the capacity to inspire and motivate followers, the principal's leadership style should include the skills to motivate and inspire all stakeholders within the school and within the greater community (Bass, 1998).

While some may have a natural inclination toward leadership, the idea of leadership training is of great importance (Thomas, 1970). Toll's (2010) research found "Savvy principals support teacher learning by attending to six areas: expectations, demonstrations, hospitality, possibility, Inquiry, and the whole learner, and they can practice in all six areas" (p. 50). When principals train in core leadership practices, they are more willing to accept every person in the school and become more comfortable accepting ideas of the team even when those ideas are different from her own (Toll, 2010). Once a principal is able to understand how he/she sends messages, how others perceive her messages, how she influences behavior, and how she communicates feelings and ideas so as to promote a positive climate that maximizes learning, she is ready to personalize a leadership style (Thomas, 1970). Because school leadership changes focus on administrative mandates (State of School Leadership, 2005), leaders must establish and understand their leadership style (Sahin, 2004) in order to process and inform these changes effectively to their staff and community. In order to determine what a principal does to build and maintain a positive school climate, one must determine what leadership style allows for a feeling of importance, a connection to the school and greater community, and for consistent student progress (Atkinson & Pilgreen, 2011).

A transactional leadership style requires less innovation and more micro-management (Sahin, 2004). To be a transactional educational leader, a willingness to maintain the current structure with a punishment and reward system is expected (Sahin, 2004). Employees are mutually dependent on each other, and no risks are taken. Leadership time is spent making sure everyone is following the rules (Inandi, Tunc & Gilic, 2013).

An autocratic leadership style is based on threatening and pressuring teachers to do their jobs with little to no input as to outcomes and goals (Dahar, Faize, Niwaz, Hussain & Zaman, 2010). The positive aspect of this style is when leaders are not exercising it (De Cremer, 2007). Making a staff do their jobs without any assistance or input is ineffective and energy draining (Inandi, Tunc & Gilic, 2013). An authoritarian leadership style is very similar in that there is a distinct separation between the leader and the follower (Farrell, 2009). Both of these leadership styles tend to have clearly defined goals that are communicated with clarity (Farrell, 2009). Neither provides positive outcomes in an educational setting. After a very short period of time, creativity disappears and employees lose their drive to push beyond the bare minimum (Inandi, Tunc & Gilic, 2013; Farrell, 2009).

A democratic leadership style is one that communicates effectively and allows for teacher input (Inandi, Tunc & Gilic, 2013). Whereas a laissez-faire leadership style is considered "freedom without order," a democratic leadership style is considered "freedom with order" (Ferguson, 2011). While this style of leadership values and respects everyone in the organization (Ferguson, 2011), the time spent gaining trust requires frequent meetings and is not entirely successful until most everyone has buy in (Goleman, 2014).

A driving leadership style has characteristics found in transformational leadership in that relationships are of great importance (Leithwood, 2012; Inandi, Tunc & Gilic, 2013). Rajbhandari (2010) defined driving leadership style expressing, "…leadership has to maintain a role of understanding people in the organizational setting" (p. 7). There is more of a desire for social harmony within the school than student achievement (Rajbhandari, 2010).

Kenneth Leithwood, has studied, at length, the characteristics of transformational leadership (Louis, Wahlstrom, Leithwood, Anderson & Educational Research, 2010; Leithwood & Strauss, 2009; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). In 2008, rather than study the significance of leadership style, he and Jantzi focused on what makes teachers trust their leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). The leadership characteristics (competence, consistency and reliability, openness, respect and integrity) that he found were consistent with attributes that make a transformational leader (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Employees want to build a trusting relationship with a transformational leader, and most likely will (Sagnak, 2010). Because of their charismatic personality, transformational leaders become role models for employees, and unlike an authoritative or autocratic leadership style, this leadership style encourages creativity and positivity (Inandi, Tunc, & Gilic, 2013). Furthermore, teachers are more willing to take risks because of the innovative influence exuded by this style of leadership (Hsiao & Chang, 2011).

In two separate studies (Herbert, 2011 & Finnigan, 2012), transformational leadership practices proved to bring positive results in improving teacher efficacy and therefore, student achievement. One study comprised of 30 principals and seven teachers from each of three school levels, showed a correlation between the emotional intelligence of the principals and transformational leadership (Herbert, 2011). There was an increase

in trust, shared decision-making and responsibility, and a sense of community (Herbert, 2011). In a qualitative study of teachers in three schools identified as low-performing schools, a transformational-style leader with a proven track record was placed in one of the schools. The transformational-style leadership enhanced motivation and teacher efficacy. Teachers in this school went from a feeling of absolutely no hope and total frustration to complete confidence and job satisfaction (Finnigan, 2012).

Regardless of the leadership style, Herbert (2011), believes "…a school administrator must be able to articulate a vision for success, inspire others to embrace the vision, and have the ability to make the necessary changes happen" (p. 4). A leader who is capable of building relationships with teachers and interacting with all staff members possess central elements in building a positive school climate (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). Sagnak (2010) agrees, "Leaders may be charismatic in the opinion of the followers and thereby inspire them; they meet emotional needs of each employee and/or provide intellectual stimulation" (p. 1137). Research reveals that although principals may have little direct influence on student work, their indirect influence has a substantial effect on student engagement and achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The importance of knowing ones leadership style is particularly revealed when a leader is challenged to change a building's climate and culture. Herbert (2011) asserts, "Fostering a culture of unity and leading the focus on common goals are essential as the school experiences a cultural change" (p. 5). Transformational leadership encompasses many of the skills needed for developing and sustaining a positive school climate (Sahin 2004; Sagnak, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Lazzaro, 2009; Raes, Decuyper, Lismont, Van den Bossche, Kyndt, Demeyere & Dochy, 2013). Interestingly, at least two researchers

feel that the absence of transformational leadership qualities can cause school reform to take place at a much slower pace (Fenn, & Mixon, 2011).

Leithwood & Jantzi (2005) remind us,

Competence is vital since people are unlikely to listen to or depend upon someone whose abilities they don't respect. Generally, employees need to believe that the leader has the skills and abilities to carry out what he or she says they will do. (p. 196).

Sergiovanni deemed the necessity of a leader's competence a virtue that accompanies professionalism (1992); and a teacher's regard for the leader is greater when he/she is perceived as competent (Grobler, Bisschoff, & Beeka, 2012). However, equally important is the ability to develop relationships, which means understanding emotions (Herbert, 2011).

Leadership styles vary, but most emphasize, honesty, a sense of responsibility, influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, consideration, and accountability (Sergiovanni, 1992; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Successful school principals incorporate very human skills (Beauchamp & Parsons, 2012) into their school and community. Leaders may or may not be attached to one particular style and leaders can learn new styles as long as there is an understanding of the needed emotional intelligence competencies (Goleman, 2014). Burns & Martin (2010) conclude, "As today's leaders seek to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to prove effective in current educational organizations, it becomes important to realize that there are no simple answers to achieve leadership excellence" (p. 30 – 31). However, trained and committed leaders increase the effectiveness of schools (Bush, 2009), and trained and committed leaders have chosen a specific leadership style that improves and sustains overall school

climate, enhances teacher efficacy, and increases student achievement (Dunn & Harris, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Edgerson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006; Brinson & Steiner, 2007).

Teacher perceptions of what the principal does to influence school climate.

Climate is how it "feels" in a building (Loukas, Suzuki & Horton, 2006), but who or what influences that feeling? The perceptions of teachers in regards to human caring, motivation, and teacher efficacy carry a great deal of weight in creating a positive school climate (Ellet, Hill, Liu, Loup & Lakshmanan, 1997). In 1970, a five day training was held for 28 elementary principals to assist them in developing a better understanding of how their actions are perceived, how to interpret stakeholders actions, how to import empathy into daily practice and how to communicate feelings and ideas that inform without insulting. The results revealed an increase in how teachers viewed the school (positive change) and how important the administrator's behavior was in developing positive relationships that led to teachers perceiving the school climate as positive (Thomas, 1970). Further research concurs (Ellet, Hill, Liu, Loup, & Lakshmanan, 1997; Edgerson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006). Teachers have a positive perception of their leaders when these leaders encourage learning and instructional improvement, make expectations clear, give the opportunity to express ideas and concerns, and build collegiality (Hill & And, 1995). Sahin (2011) attests, "Principals can promote a positive culture by acting in a certain way that sends signals to teachers and students that they can achieve more" (p. 1921).

A school's climate is perceived as positive when the principal is a strong instructional leader and expresses a belief in the teachers' ability to achieve (Sahin, 2011). A critical aspect of teacher perception is collective teacher efficacy where teachers

believe that they, along with their colleagues positively impact students (Brinson & Steiner, 2007). Again, collective efficacy exists when principals serve as instructional leaders and work to develop teachers' gifts and talents (Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci & Cagatay, 2012), which is easily understood, but not always easy to accomplish (Reeves, 2010).

Principals leading schools with a high minority population and a lower socio-economic status are often perceived negatively due to the increased challenge of large gaps in student achievement (Klar and Brewer, 2013). Teachers often feel defeated and they have little sense of self-efficacy (Finnigan, 2012). However, leaders who treat staff members with respect and work to build personal relationships reduce stress and increase teacher motivation and confidence leading toward a sense of collective efficacy and a more positive school climate (Finnigan, 2012). When school climate is positive, principals spend more time building relationships, and collective teacher efficacy evolves, student performance increases, negativity toward socio-economic status lessens, parent and teacher relationships improve, and teachers become more committed to the school (Brinson & Steiner, 2007).

Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci & Cagatay (2012) found "…school principals' instructional leadership behaviors have a positive, significant effect on teachers' self-efficacy" (p. 2501). Principals are influential in building a positive school climate and that influence is based on teacher perception (Hill and And, 1995; Karakose, 2008; Brinson and Steiner, 2007); Grobler, Bisschoff & Beeka, 2012). Having a positive, open communication climate motivates teachers to speak up, speak out, and take risks (Lee, Park & Choi, 2011). Hoy, Smith & Sweetland (2002), agree, "The open school climate is one in which behavior of both teachers and principals is authentic; teacher and principals

respect one another and are 'straight' with each other. Acts of leadership emerge easily and appropriately as needed from both groups" (p. 38).

Insights and attitudes in a school reflect the principal's leadership (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002; Moller, Mickelson, Stearns, Bottia, Banerjee & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2011). If the insights and attitudes are positive, it is because the principal is nurturing quality relationships (Edgerson, Kristonis, & Herrington, 2006).

What principals do.

If the research proves that based on the definition of school climate (Lencioni, 2006; Maxwell, 2011; Loukas, 2011; and the Center for Comprehensive School Reform, 2009), it is important to develop a positive climate within the school (Dunn & Harris, 1998; Gruenert, 2005; Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002), and the principal, and more specifically, the principal's leadership style (Calik, Sezgin, Kaygaci & Kilinc, 2012) influences school climate, what is it that principals actually do to create and maintain a positive school climate? Studies have shown that the principal's actions may fall into different, identifiable categories (Atkinson & Pilgreen, 2011; Brinson & Steiner; Drago & Severson, 2012; Gruenert, 2005). The categories that were found to be the most common and in common for this study are: vision, relationships, support of student learning, community, and the school building itself (Atkinson & Pilgreen, 2011; Brinson & Steiner; Drago & Severson, 2012; Gruenert, 2005).

Vision.

Weller, Hartley and Sylvia (1994) assert (as cited in Collins & Porras, 1991) that "Developing vision, that seemingly mystical and sometimes elusive concept, is the most important element in making any organization highly effective in promoting quality products" (para. 1). Establishing a vision allows the school level leader to build an

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environment where the faculty shares responsibility, the same beliefs and the same values (Strahan, Carlone & Horn, 2004; Drago-Severson, 2012). It is important, however, for all stakeholders to understand the benefits the vision will provide if the expectation is that all involved are on board (Kose, 2011). With a collaborative effort, the development of a school vision unifies the school and generates purpose and a sense of direction along with a more collective commitment (Weller & Hartley, 1994). Vision should provide an outline of focus that goes beyond test scores but still integrating accountability at all levels (Supovitz, 2015). Schools are typically required to have a stated vision; however, Weller & Hartley (1994) explain, "The benefits of vision lie not in catchy phrases, but in the process used to reach the point where such a phrase embodies the purpose, meaning, and vision of the school from the varying perspectives of all its different customers" (Vision Section, Para. 2).

The idea of creating a common vision is not new (Capper, 2000; Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, Milliken & Talbert, 2003; Lindstrom & Speck, 2004; Strahan, Carlone, & Horn, 2004; Woodrum, 1999). Kose (2011), contends, "there has been little empirical examination of principal practices that shape the development of a transformative collective vision" (p. 120) giving this research more value and credence. The bottom line is effective principals share a vision (Adkins-Coleman, 2010), and are authentic in doing so (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002).

Relationships.

With so many new initiatives each year and so much political divisiveness, the focus of school leadership must move beyond the idea of student outcomes (Sergiovanni, 2000). There has to be a focus on the relationships among the adults in the school building (Pryrtd, 2004). Toll (2010), contends, "Savvy principals support teacher learning

by attending to six areas: expectations, demonstrations, hospitality, possibility, Inquiry, and the whole learner, and they can practice strategies in all six areas" (p. 50). Hospitality is synonymous to relationships in that the core of hospitality includes support, friendliness, a welcoming demeanor, and acceptance of everyone in the building (Toll, 2010). The overall disposition of the principal runs parallel with student and teacher performance (Thompson & Crank, 2010). Hoerr (2014) compares a school environment to the environment of a restaurant, "Really good restaurants do more than offer high-quality food, just as really good schools do more than impart skills and knowledge" (p. 88). Teachers want to work in a highly successful school, and when principals focus on the hospitality piece, and creating a positive atmosphere, teachers begin to believe that their school is successful (Sergiovanni, 2000). Building relationships does not mean a lack of focus on the work being done, it means looking at all aspects of school work and according to Bonnici (2011), principals must "maximize the positives; minimize the negatives" (p. 54). The most successful teachers have a positive, comfortable relationship with their principal (Adoegun and Olisaemeka, 2011). Strong relationships in the school building are afforded when the principal accepts, respects, and dignifies employees, which means all employees are accepted for the value they bring to the building. The relationship is about the person and not the person's personality (Toll, 2010). Principals act according to the unique culture of their schools. When school leaders focus on creating an atmosphere conducive to school success, the school is perceived by the teachers and students as being successful (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Support of student learning.

Success should not be based solely on performance testing, but on student learning (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Principals must lead in ways that promote mastery

experiences for teachers by making sure they have quality professional learning, and the resources that they need to help students learn (Manthey, 2006). Pedersen, Yager and Yager (2012) agree, "Successful principals establish the work conditions that enable teachers to be better teachers. The ability to share with others and collaborate with them for the purpose of providing instruction that is conducive to enhancing student development is critical given the many demands put upon the system" (p. 2). To establish a pervasive culture of teaching and learning, principals must be intentional (MacNeil, Prater, Busch, 2009), and the first step in establishing this culture is gaining trust (Beauchamp & Parsons, 2012). Handford & Leithwood (2013) agree; "Trust is a critical concept for leaders to understand and develop because it serves as a 'lubricant' for most interactions in their organizations allowing less time to be spent on details, planning and attending to messages, and more time to be spent on actions that contribute to organizational improvements" (p. 194). These actions include the provision for teachers to collaborate (Yager, Pedersen, Yager, and Noppe, 2011). Building and fostering a culture of collaboration to enhance student learning is not easy (Drago-Severson, 2012). However, if principals believe in being an instructional leader and continue to grow as an instructional leader (Sahin, 2011), build rapport with a focus on good communication (Ellis & National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1998), student learning will improve.

Community.

Involving parents and the school community in school enhances a school's climate (Johnson, 2007). Villa (2003) shares, "Important learnings take place within the school community as well as the school" (p. 777). Successful principals build a positive school climate by capturing opportunities for innovations, and allowing the school to play

key roles in community improvement (Martin, 2007). Building community gives parents, teachers and students a sense of ownership and pride (Van Voorhis & Shelton, 2004), which builds empathy and an open mind allowing principals to make better choices for the school at large (Johnson, 2013).

School building.

School leaders can have a significant influence on what teachers do in the classroom by motivating teachers and students to create workplace settings compatible with instructional practice (Wahlstrom, Leithwood, Anderson & Educational Research, 2010); however, when the instructional facility is not clean and in good repair, it is difficult for students and teachers to put forth the effort to make it that way (Egerson, Kritsonis & Herrington, 2006; Earthman, Lemasters & Council of Educational Facility Planners, 1996). Deteriorating schools can have a negative impact on student and teacher morale. Students score much lower on standardized achievement tests if they are in a school that has not been maintained, and teachers are less satisfied with their jobs if the condition of their school is poor (Blazer & Miami-Dade Public Schools, 2012). Roberts, Peter & Edgerton (2008) share "The current literature indicates that one important mediating variable in determining student achievement is the learning environment, or the school's social climate. Facility conditions affect the climate of a school through such things as student morale and teacher commitment; when morale, commitment, pride of place, and enthusiasm are raised, the important work of teaching and learning is made more effective" (p. 49).

Baku (2014), defines principal influence as "the ability to affect another's attitudes, beliefs or behaviors – seen only in its effect – without using coercion or formal position, and in a way that influences belief that they are not acting in their own best

interests" (p. 181). Successful school leaders are human, and down to earth; they want the best for all stakeholders and work to build solid relationships to make that happen (Beauchamp & Parsons, 2012). Building those strong relationships involves principal action in the areas of vision, relationships, support of student learning, involving the community, and maintaining the school building.

Gaps in the literature.

Why some leaders are successful, and others are not when it comes to cultivating the climate of the school is a question that requires a deeper look into those cultures. Using a case study to look at characteristics of positive school climate, and possibly suggesting factors that have not been considered in this analysis of climate, may provide important insights toward a successful campaign. Further research is required to determine how principals decide to acclimate their leadership habits, and how aspiring leaders can best learn to do so (Klar & Brewer, 2013). While leadership style and school climate have been studied extensively, there is a gap in setting up principals and schools for success based on leadership attributes that teachers perceive as desirable for improving the overall school including positive climate and student achievement.

Conclusion.

Throughout the literature, the principal's role in developing a positive school climate is ever present. Nor and Roslan (2009) set out to prove this phenomenon:

> A caring school culture helps build positive relationships, a sense of belonging, and positive self-concept amongst members of the school. The role of the principals in shaping a caring school culture is pivotal in pursuing a sense of belonging amongst students in the school as well as confidence in their self worth (p. 23)

If the primary role of a principal is to establish and maintain school climate (feelings and attitudes) because of its powerful effect on teaching and learning in schools, then principals must understand what it is that they do and say that defines the climate in their schools (Sahin, 2011). To do this, the leader must know how to measure the climate in the building (Freiberg, 1998). Researchers differ in their opinions on how to accomplish this. Greenhouse schools begin with everything new including the building and all employees with a carefully fostered climate (TNTP, 2012). In North Carolina, high performing school perceived to have a positive school climate were measured using six elements: transformational leadership, collaboration, communication, teacher empowerment, mentoring and parental and community involvement (Stone, 2009). Another study measured the correlations of collaborative school cultures to determine the overall school climate by using survey questions looking for six elements labeled differently: *collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnerships* (Gruenert, 2005), but with similar connotations. In other studies, the climate of a school has been measured using surveys (Reeves, 2010), interviews (Meier, 2012), the Organizational Climate Index (Hoy, 2002), and the Organizational Health Inventory (MacNeil, Prater, Busch, 2009). Freiberg makes the case that no single factor in a school building defines school climate; instead, school climate is multi-dimensional and must be studied from many areas of the organization using many techniques (1998). While seemingly true, this makes the idea of developing and sustaining a positive school climate seem more impossible.

Teachers are not just looking for a nice leader, they are looking for a knowledgeable educator who encourages learning, has high expectations, and builds collegiality (Hill & And, 1995). The principal's influence is strong especially when she

acts in a way that builds teacher self-efficacy (Brinson & Steiner, 2007). Ellet, Hill, Liu, Loup & Lakshmanan, (1997) concur "If human caring includes active attentiveness and responsiveness to the needs and feelings of others, it stands to reason that it can be linked to a total motivational system in the *helping* professions like teaching, social work, counseling, etc." (p. 14). Developing and sustaining a positive school climate is a high priority. Educational leaders have great influence over teachers, so much so that a leader can impact teacher job satisfaction and overall commitment to the students that they teach. A school leader with a vision, a commitment to providing quality professional development, and a commitment to building strong, positive relationships with staff members spawn the greatest influence (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

Leadership quality makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes (Bush, 2009). Developing leadership style is significant and training is imperative to understand the way messages are perceived and given (Thomas, 1970). Principals are being asked to create a safe, supportive learning environment built on encouragement and respect where all stakeholders believe they can make a positive difference (Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Johnson, 2013). To do so, school leaders must move from a management role to the role of instructional leader (Drago-Severson, 2012) while being able to build relationships with teachers and students (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas, 2004).

This literature review provided a working definition of school climate based on the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education (2009), Organizational Climate Index (2010), and the National School Climate Council (2014), which include four common areas, a strong support for learning, stakeholder engagement, collegiality, and principal leadership (Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia Superintendents Association,

2010; Gruenert, 2005; Gulsen & Guleanay, 2014; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; National School Climate Center, 2014) along with an understanding of how influential the role of principal is related to school climate. The assessment of background knowledge on leadership style and how teachers perceive leadership style further showed the necessity of vision, competence and an authentic desire to serve. The focus of this research was to prove that the relationships among the adults in the building do impact student achievement (Barth, 1990; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008); however, those relationships are rich and impactful dependent upon the actions of the principal, and on how the principal's actions are perceived by the adults in the building.

After reviewing the literature, there is a clear understanding that the road to student achievement is paved when a school principal has a leadership style that no only commands instructional governance, but also hosts an intentional focus on building positive relationships (Blankstein, Houston, & Hope, 2011). The impact of this research on the broader field of education is significant because it supports Bush's (2009) idea of tying student achievement directly back to the skills of the principal while synthesizing additional research to support this idea.

Konakli (2014) defines principal leadership as "the ability to affect another's attitudes, beliefs or behavior seen only in its effect – without coercion of formal position, and in a way that influences beliefs that they are acting in their own best interest" (p. 181). Teacher training, for example, is dependent upon school leaders being able to take the visceral talent they receive in newly hired teachers, insert inspiration, encouragement, and exceptional training so that teachers develop instructional practices that are effective, and acquire a sense of self-efficacy that impacts students positively (Bonnici, 2011; Calik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, & Cagatay, 2012). The relationships among the adults in a school

building, and therefore student achievement, are dependent upon a principals' ability to effectively lead instructionally, and manage all aspects of school business (Bush, 2009; DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas, 2004).

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2 SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The purpose of this research was to assess the impact of the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project within two different school districts, to assess what features of the Vision Project had specifically impacted learning in each school, and to assess how the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project helped to build capacity of self and others in the school. The secondary purpose of this research was to determine what the principal did specifically that impacted the climate and organizational efficacy in the school. The review of the literature concluded with evidence of what a principal actually does to influence a positive climate in the school building, hinging on teacher perceptions of their principal's leadership style and how that style focuses (or not) on the importance of developing a positive climate within the school.

The analysis for this dissertation featured the interface between practice and theory (Yin, 2014). That is, the evidence collected regarding the principal's influence on the climate of the school was tied directly to a working definition of school climate established, in part, to assess trustworthiness (Thomas, 2006). The definition of school climate taken from the literature included four areas of impact: (a) Support for Learning, (b) Stakeholder Engagement, (c) Collegiality, and (d) Principal Leadership (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006; School Climate, 2014). Moreover, these four areas from the literature regarding the job of principal intertwine nicely with the guiding principles for one of the seven critical educational system components established in the Georgia Vision Project (Appendix D) under *Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy* (Vision for Public Education, 2009).

The Georgia Vision Project for Public Education was born out of a collaborative effort between the Georgia School Boards Association and the Georgia School

Superintendents Association in 2009. Together these establishments (15 from each association) published a document with forty-five recommendations for Georgia school boards of education. They included seven different categories and within those categories there were specific recommendations. The categories included: (a) early learning and student success, (b) teaching and learning, (c) teaching and learning resources, (d) human and organizational capital, (e) governance, leadership, and accountability, (g) culture, climate, and organizational efficacy, and (h) financial resources (Vision for Public Education, 2009). The secondary focus of this study was in regards to school climate and the principal's impact on the development of that climate. The recommendations provided by the Georgia Vision Project in the standard labeled culture, climate, and organizational efficacy was used as a comparison to the four areas commonly found in the literature related to what most impacts a school's climate (Appendix D). According to the Executive Director of the Georgia Vision Project, at the time of this research, 146 of 180 school districts in Georgia have approved a resolution of support for the Vision Project and were using the recommendations in their operational plans. For the purpose of this study, two districts that implemented the project with fidelity were selected as sites for case studies. The definition of implementation with fidelity is that the systems used the project as the driving force behind their strategic planning process.

This is a qualitative, two-case case study in which theories have been developed based on the data analysis and the researcher's history and experience (Bruner, 1973). In addition, this case study can be described as an instrumental case study due to the fact that the initial research question was used to understand or provide insight regarding the impact of the Georgia Vision Project (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Boozer, 2015). Based, in part, on the work of McCaslin & Scott (2003), and Thomas (2006), a general inductive

approach was chosen to focus on the realities of the participants within the school districts, and the process by which leaders lead that creates a positive climate in the school in a simple, straightforward design gaining conclusions in the context of focused research questions (Thomas, 2006). The general inductive approach is similar to the analytic framework as defined by Miles and Huberman (1983). The consistencies include a solid list of procedures, data processing that began with the first interviews and continued along the way, and the incorporation of a data reduction strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1983; Thomas, 2006). The evaluation objectives used to guide the primary research were the eight categories along with the recommendations under each category in the Vision Project. The evaluation objectives used to guide the secondary research were found in only one category, *Climate, Culture and Organizational Efficacy* (Thomas, 2006). Using the general inductive approach, data were analyzed by studying the realities of teacher and principal perceptions using research questions that allowed what is relevant to emerge with a specific procedural method (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014; Thomas, 2006). Systematic data was gathered using interviews and district strategic plans. The data was then analyzed (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). Analysis included a demanding, and meticulous reading and coding of transcripts allowing explicit themes to be established (Thomas, 2006). The study was initiated by the assignment of a purposeful, homogeneous sampling of two *Race to the Top* school districts implementing the Georgia Vision Project with fidelity.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative case study that examined the relationship between principal leadership and school climate. The study is framed using the General Inductive Approach as described by Thomas (2006), and began with open, semi-formal

interviews and became more structured and formal once the overall perspective was ascertained (Dufour, Brassard & Martel, 2015). Wright-Maley (2013) found that the effectiveness of conducting semi-structured interviews lay in the fact that it allows for a focus on perceptions. Data analysis allowed for patterns and themes to emerge (Thomas, 2006). Once complete, the interviews were transcribed, read, re-read and scrutinized. Initial themes emerged based on word/subject usage and whether or not the theme occurred in all interview groups including the district office representatives, the principals, the individual teacher leaders, and the focus groups. Those themes were then correlated to the recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project. The themes were then narrowed by the correlation to each of the four areas commonly found in the literature having an impact on school climate (Appendix C). One advantage of using the General Inductive Approach included the ability of the researcher to show the array of aspects and influences along the way, and how they have worked together to produce perspectives (Thomas, 2006).

The purpose of this Vision Project Case Study was to determine to what degree the project's implementation had impacted teaching and learning, leadership and accountability, and most specifically school climate in two high implementation districts. Specifically, this study examined what principals do that impacts or determines the climate of a school, in an effort to establish action steps for school principals to follow in order to create a positive school climate. This research looked at two schools in two different school districts to determine principal and teacher perceptions in regards to what a leader does to develop and maintain a positive school climate in which teachers feel confident in their work and therefore have a greater impact on student achievement (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

Case study participants.

Interviews took place in two different school districts in an effort to strengthen the findings of the impact the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project had when implemented with fidelity. Replication logic rather than sampling logic (Yin, 2014) was used in choosing informants for this case study given that both school districts included interviews with district employees holding the same professional position, as well as using the same interview protocols and questions to convince the reader of common phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Participants for this case study were chosen from two different school districts identified by the executive director of the Georgia Vision Project as districts implementing the Georgia Vision Project with fidelity. The district's superintendent or designee chose the schools that would participate, and the principals of those schools chose the teachers to be interviewed as well as the teachers who served in the focus groups. Specific direction for choosing the school and the principal was not given and the principals in each district were asked to choose teacher leaders (2 for individual interviews and 4 to participate in a focus group). In District A, the principal was beginning his third year as principal and in District B, the principal was beginning his second year as principal. In District A, the range in teacher experience for the individual interview was 7 (10 years and 3 years) and in District B, the range in teacher experience for the individual interview was 8 (13 years and 5 years). The focus group interview in District A had a teacher range of experience from 7 to 15 years and the focus group interview in District B had a teacher range of experience from 13 to 20 years. The focus group in District A was dominated by one teacher with very little being said by the other three. The time and location was mutually determined by the researcher and the

principals in order to provide the most convenience for the participants. Each participant signed an informed consent prior to the interviews.

School district A.

School District A obtained Charter School System status in 2011. The school system's mission reads as follows: *The mission is to ensure that all students will be successful in their learning and personal development through a system characterized by a challenging, personalized educational program encompassing advanced technology; extensive community and parental involvement; quality resources; an exemplary staff; and a safe and caring environment.* School District A lists the following as school district "beliefs" (last revision, 2012):

- Schools must be safe, positive and inviting places that put children first;

- The needs of the whole child must guide decision-making;

- All students will reach high academic standards through a quality, personalized education delivered by highly skilled educators using best practices supported by research;

- Parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members must share responsibility for life-long learning;

- The educational community must be responsive to the needs of our local and larger global society; and

- Positive changes, based on continuous evaluation, are necessary for educational growth (Website – School District A, 2014).

There were a total of five schools in School District A: 1 primary (K-2), 1 elementary (3-5), 1 middle (6-8), 1 high (9-12), and 1 county alternative education program. In February 2014, the total school enrollment was approximately 3,500 (See

Table I) with 64% white, 28% African American, 5% Hispanic, 2% Multi-racial 1%, Asian. There are 259 teachers (88% white, 10% African American, and 2% Other). 50% of School District A's students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. All of the schools hold Title I Targeted Assistance eligibility.

The district's areas of focus included providing collaborative planning through high performance learning communities and making this planning a "non-negotiable" for teacher/leader/and school accountability, along with safety. As a result of the changes in state and national assessments, the district established system-wide "Non-negotiables for high student performance" which included a commitment to the Vision for Public Education (Vision For Public, 2009). To ensure that all schools in the district are inviting, it was established that classroom environments would be built on the following: strong student/teacher relationships; the needs of the students; established routines and procedures; displayed Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, essential questions; and, evidence of student work that is engaging and that reflects state standards. To ensure an orderly environment, schools are to establish positive classroom management practices that provide support for the behavioral/emotional/social needs of each student (School District A, 2014).

The visit with School District A began at the elementary school, which included grades three through five. The principal offered a time and place for his interview, set up interviews with two teacher leaders individually, and provided interview time for one four-member, teacher leader focus group. The interview with the principal took place in his office and lasted approximately one hour. That interview was followed by two individual one hour interviews with teacher leaders, and the interview sessions with this school ended with the one hour focus group interview that included four teacher leaders

who had served as teachers at the school between two to sixteen years. After interviewing at the school, an interview took place at the district office with an assistant superintendent.

School district B.

The vision of School District B boasts, "Our school system will be world class". The school system's mission reads as follows: To produce high-achieving students. School District B lists the following as school district beliefs/values:

- Safety is our number one priority,

- Failure is not an option,

- We will not be satisfied until all of our schools meet or exceed the highest academic standards,

- We are committed to determining what each child needs to fulfill his or her potential,

- We take responsibility for learning, not only for our students but also for ourselves, and

- We are not afraid of change and will embrace change that is research-based and proven to be effective (School District B, 2014).

School District B also lists specific expectations for employees, which include:

- Strive for excellence in all that we do;

- Have a professional attitude;

- Go the extra mile;

- Base decisions on what's best for the child;

- Provide quality customer service;

- Hard work, dedication and love for children;

- Approach work every day with a positive attitude, hope, enthusiasm and compassion; and Do things right; do the right thing (School District B, 2014).

There is a link to the Georgia Vision for Public Education on the district's website, but it is not listed specifically as part of the district's strategic plan. Likewise, the beliefs/values and expectations of School District B are embedded in the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education, but are not listed specifically as the school district lists them.

There were 39 total schools in School District B (3 primary, 20 elementary, 8 middle, 5 high, 1 crossroads center, 1 career and technology center, and 1 credit recovery program). There were approximately 30,000 students (See Table I) with 79% white, 18.6% African American, 1.36% Hispanic, .0033% Asian, .033% Multi-racial. There were approximately 2300 certified employees.

The visit with School District B began at the elementary school, which included grades three through five. The principal set up an interview with himself, with two teacher leaders individually, and provided interview time for one four-member, teacher leader focus group. The interview with the principal took place in his office and lasted approximately one-hour. That one-hour interview was followed by two individual one hour interviews with teacher leaders, and the interview sessions with this school ended with a one-hour focus group interview that included four teacher leaders who had served as teachers at the school from three years to twelve years. The interviews concluded with a one-hour session with the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning who met at the school for his interview.

The most obvious difference in the two districts appears to be size (See Table I). School

District A had more than 3000 students in 4 schools and School District B had nearly

30,000 students in 38 schools. District size does have an impact on superintendent

leadership. Hentschki, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter (2009), found "…leadership behavior of

superintendents in smaller districts appeared remarkably distinct…they were hands-on

and personally engaged in instructional leadership" p. 334. This generated a question for

later research regarding the impact district size has on principal leadership at the school

level. A common desired attribute of school principals, based on this case study, was the

ability to be an effective instructional leader. A future study might delve into the level of

instructional leadership exhibited by the principals in smaller districts vs. larger districts.

While both districts provided a link to the Georgia Vision for Public Education, only

School District A included the standards deeply embedded within the district's strategic

plan. Each non-negotiable practice for high student performance in School District A was

linked to a standard in the Georgia Vision for Public Education (School District A, 2014).

Research design.

   This qualitative, two-case case study included principals and staff members in two

unique school districts and their participation in interviews. This study follows an

instrumental multiple case study design enabling exploration of a particular focus within

a case to find answers to the specific research question (Stake, 1995). For this particular

study, two schools within two districts were chosen because the districts had

implemented the Georgia Vision Project with fidelity. This was instrumental in

determining the impact that a principal has on the climate of a school based on the fact

that one of the eight standards in the Georgia Vision Project is dedicated to culture,

climate and organizational efficacy within a school (Georgia Vision for Public Education,

2009). Thus, this study sought to understand something other than the outcome of incorporating the Georgia Vision for Public Education with fidelity. This case study sought to understand the perceptions that teachers had on the impact the principal of a school has on the climate of a school implementing the Georgia Project for public education with fidelity. According to Stake (1995), "Instrumental case study is research on a case to gain understanding of something else" (p. 16). By studying two districts who had incorporated the Georgia Vision Project standards into their strategic plan, where one of those standards is focused specifically on the culture, climate, and educational efficacy of a school, it became feasible to gain understanding of the impact the principal had in determining the overall climate of the schools (Stake, 1995).

Binding the case set boundaries relating to time (collecting data between August and October, 2015), location (limiting data collection to two systems highly implementing the Georgia Vision Project for Education with fidelity), and process (interviewing educators holding the same position in both districts, and using the same interview questions) so that the study did not become too broad (Creswell, 1998).

Guided research questions related specifically to the Georgia Vision for Education are as follows:

1. How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in the school? (Support for learning, Principal leadership)

2. What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in the school?

3   How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build the capacity of

     self and others in the school? (Collegiality, Support for learning, Stakeholder

     engagement)

4   What does the principal do to impact the climate, culture, and organizational

     efficacy in your school as it relates to the four areas of impact established in the

     working definition of positive school climate; i.e., Support for learning,

     Stakeholder engagement, Collegiality, and Principal leadership? (Specifically

     related to the guiding principals of the Vision for Georgia Education, section 8.0)

Table 1

Demographic Comparison

Demographic	District A	District B
Total number of Schools	5	39
Total number of Students	3500	30,000
White	64%	79%
African American	28%	18.6%
Hispanic	5%	1.36%
Multi-racial	2%	.033%
Asian	1%	.0033%
Eligible for free or reduced lunch	50%	54%
Median county household income	$44,908	$55,738
Total Number of Employees	425	3,826

Data collection.

According to Yin (2014), "Qualitative study capitalizes on ordinary ways of getting acquainted with things" (p. 49). Data collection for this case study came from two different school districts in Georgia and included a one-hour long semi-structured interview with the principal from each of the two schools chosen, one-hour interviews with two teachers individually at each of the schools, a one-hour interview with a four person team of teacher leaders at each of the schools, and one semi-structured, one-hour long interview with the researcher and a district office official at each of the school districts. Interview and focus group participants were to be knowledgeable about the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project; however, there was little known knowledge of the Vision Project (by name) by teachers at the school level in either district but this was not surprising to those interviewed at the district office. The initial interview with the district office representative began by sharing the purpose of the study, the type of data to be collected, how that data would be analyzed, and the length of the interview (Creswell, 2014). The interviews included probing questions in regard to school history, demographics, school climate and culture, and the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project (See Appendix A).

 Two one-hour interviews at each district were conducted with a purposefully chosen teacher focus group including four teachers identified as teacher leaders from each school district selected by the school's principal. These focus groups answered probing questions in regards to principal leadership and how their principal impacted the overall school climate (See Appendix A).

Finally, one-hour interviews with two teachers from each district were conducted individually. The district's superintendent chose the school where the interviews would

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take place and the principal to be interviewed. The principal selected two teacher leaders within their buildings. The individual teacher interview questions included probing questions regarding their principal's leadership and how their principal impacted the overall school climate (See Appendix A).

The assistant superintendents, principals and teachers were told that follow-up interviews may be included in the data collection process, but none were needed. After each interview/focus group session, the participants were acknowledged, thanked, and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed using a secured transcription service and member checking was applied by sending the transcribed documents back to the interviewees for inspection, and the opportunity to offer input in the form of additions and deletions to the written dialogue as each deemed appropriate.

Data analysis.

In determining the means for data analysis, Yin (2014) describes its contents, "Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to produce empirically based findings" (p. 132). Information from interviews and focus groups was collected with the use of audio technology via a digital voice recorder with transcription of notes transcribed by a secure transcriptionist; the notes were then organized for analysis.

Data collected from interview sessions and focus groups from each district were examined and patterns and themes emerged showing trends and differences between the two chosen schools regarding the impact of the Georgia Vision Project and the actions of the principals in developing and sustaining a positive school climate. Initial categories of information (open coding) were established by segmenting the information gained from

the transcriptions into the following groups: county office representatives, principals, teachers, focus group I, and focus group II. The focus groups were separated because of the vast difference in their responses. In school district A, there was a true group discussion where participants contributed fairly equally. In school district B, one particular teacher dominated the conversation with input from the others. The open coding allowed for the organization of key terms placed in the five different groups (Appendix C). Twenty keywords were identified in the data analysis process. Those words were tallied by usage and by the group(s) in which they were used (See Appendix C). The top six commonly used words were suitable for major themes of the study; however, since five of the six of those terms were also included in the terms mentioned by all five groups, the themes were determined based on the terms that were mentioned in district office interviews, individual teacher interviews, principal interviews, and focus group I and focus group II collectively, thus giving voice to all participants interviewed. An additional theme (caring/concerned) mentioned in only five of the six groups was added, because it was the term mentioned the second highest number of times. The only group not mentioning the term was the district office interview participants.

Once open coding was complete, one prominent category, "The Principal" was considered the center of the process (axial coding), and an established relationship was identified between "The Principal" and its relationship to the other categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 2012), which included some portion of four of the seven recommendation categories in the Georgia Vision Project. Based on the interrelationships discovered in the axial coding, insight was gained to help in explaining teacher and principal perceptions of what the principal does to impact the climate of a school (Creswell, 2012). To further develop the theory, selective coding was used to develop a

narrative or storyline based on the interrelationships found within the axial coding categories (Creswell, 2012). Because of the case study format, results included attitudes, and expressions. Once the focus groups and individual interviews were transcribed (via a secured transcriptionist), and categorized, the information was put into a table to assist in working with the data (Yin, 2014). The goal was to interpret the data interjecting personal views to be compared to the findings of this study and to the findings represented in the literature (Creswell, 2012). Ultimately, through an inductive process, specific leadership attributes that impact school climate surfaced and these attributes were referenced in the Georgia Vision Project and intertwined throughout this study and other students throughout the literature.

Finally, interview and focus group data was validated using triangulation with document analysis to include strategic plan documents, individual school and system websites, and climate surveys (annual perception surveys and climate surveys from recent accreditation documents). Thurmond (2001) touts the benefits of this type of triangulation to be the method of "increasing confidence in research data, creating innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, revealing unique findings, challenging or integrating theories, and providing a clearer understanding of the problem" (p. 254).

Results

District A.

The Georgia Vision Project (GVP) offers seven categories of recommendations. This study invited and received the opinions of eight professional educators, from District A on the subject of school climate, the principal's impact, and the impact of the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education. The educators interviewed from District A had between four and twenty-eight years experience; six of

them served as classroom teachers/teacher leaders, one served as a school principal, and one served in a leadership position at the district office. The GVP begins with an overarching general recommendation to promote public education and to promote the successes of students and schools. District A developed a school improvement plan consisting of five Strategic Goal Areas:

- Student Achievement,

- Community and Schools Relationships and Engagement,

- Climate,

- Continuous Development, and

- Operational Effectiveness.

Each of these goal areas included fifteen performance objectives and each objective included a set of performance measures (District A's Strategic Plan as outlined on their website). Each of the goal areas is tied to a recommendation in the Georgia Vision for Public Education. Three of the recommendation categories in the GVP were not evident to the analysis of this data (strand 3.0, strand 7.0, and strand 8.0). The first strand (3.0), *Early Learning and Student Success* was not evident in the analysis of these data. While School District A did serve children in early childhood, and the district's strategic plan includes this strand, the school in District A where the interviews took place only served children in grades three through five. Therefore, there were no interview questions directly tied to that portion of the Georgia Vision Project, and no mention was made about early education (prior to third grade) playing a significant part in the way the principal, school or teacher classrooms function. The recommendation labeled *Governance, Leadership, and Accountability* and the recommendation labeled *financial resources* were not considered when developing the interview protocol.

Teaching and learning.

The GVP strand labeled *Teaching and Learning*, did prove to be relevant to the

work in District A. This strand included teachers working and planning together in an

environment where they are supported; teachers using a variety of technologies to teach

and assess students; teachers challenging students and providing flexibility for those

students who need additional assistance and those who need enrichment; and teachers

using a variety of assessments to determine what children have mastered (Vision for

Public Education, 2009). The themes that appeared in analyzing the data did so through

responses to a question requesting information about how the internal contexts coupled

with the implementation of the GVP impacted learning and leadership and what features

of the GVP have specifically impacted learning in the school. The teachers and principals

talked about the importance of student learning and the impact the principal has on

making sure student learning took place. Student learning was mentioned in all five

groups. (See Appendix C). The teachers in the focus group in school district A were

enthusiastic about the impact the new principal had on student learning. Recommendation

4.1 in the GVP states, *In order to provide an environment where students learn best,*

ensure that teacher's work and plan together, learn and share effective teaching

practices and are provided support for their on-going learning. In the focus group

interview, the teachers agreed as a group that teachers needed to be able to take risks and

challenge themselves and the students without fearing retribution from administration if

classrooms were not conducted as traditionally expected (FG-District A). While the GVP

mentions the need for the use of technology in a variety of ways, technology use in the

classroom was not included in the interviews with District A. Recommendation 4.4 in the

GVP states, *In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that*

teachers use varied measures to determine what students know and can do. In each

interview, the subject of assessments and the necessity of assessments surfaced.

However, being inundated with assessments without the opportunity to use them had

become the major concern. One teacher leader from District B stated, "There are so many

expectations coming down from the state that puts pressure on our district office to assess

more. That message is given to the principals and the principals have no choice but to

make us do it. We have given more assessments this year than ever and for the most part,

I don't know how my students did or what the assessment showed" (FG-A). A teacher

leader from District A stated, "I think that all teachers want is to be able to teach and not

feel like you have a hotshot standing over your shoulder looking at your latest assessment

scores. This has taken away the ability to step away from the cookie cutter and do fun and

innovative things with our students" (TL-A)

Teaching and learning resources.

The next strand, *Teaching and Learning Resources*, proved to be somewhat

evident during the interviews with educators in District A. The strand places an emphasis

on determining the most effective instructional strategies in which students are engaged

in learning, staying up-to-date with technology (equipment and training), maintaining a

complete data system for monitoring student progress, and developing partnerships in the

community to serve as resources in the school. Due to the small size of District A, there

were some comparisons made in regards to the size of the district office and the

feasibility of having coordinators for each subject area to provide ongoing professional

learning. One teacher leader in the focus group stated, and the others concurred,

> In larger counties, there are educators dedicated to subject level curriculum and
>
> they seek out the best resources and strategies to be used in the classroom. Here, it

is all on us and there is no time to go anywhere other than the classroom next door (TL-District A).

Once coding was complete for the four different interview categories (teacher, principal, district office, and two focus groups), only two of the four mentioned resources as something needed for building a positive climate in the school, and overall, "resources" ranked in the lowest five characteristics that impact student learning.

However, professional learning was mentioned, specifically, in regards to student achievement and school climate in each individual, and each group interviewed. When asked about the features of the GVP that specifically impacted the learning in the school, the principal in District A did not report a specific impact in the school, but noted, "It (GVP) motivated the district office to increase focus on student achievement and on helping schools give teachers the training and resources that they needed in order to raise test scores" (P-District A). Later in the interview, this principal stated, "School Improvement Plans actually began to affect instruction following implementation of the GVP" (P-District A). The district worked to ensure that professional learning offered throughout the county was focused, clear, and related to the district goals. The GVP inspired District A to train their professionals on the continuous learning process. The teachers in District A cited the principal's willingness to allow them some autonomy in choosing professional learning opportunities improved the overall school climate. This strand was included in the district's strategic plan under goal area I: Student Achievement. The performance objectives include monitoring student progress using *High Performance Professional Learning Communities* as an effective resource.

Human and organizational capital.

The main focus of the strand, Human and Organizational Capital, is about finding viable candidates from teacher prep programs, evaluating those programs, and hiring highly effective teachers to maximize student achievement. For the most part, this strand was not evident in the analysis of the data in District A. However, one section of this strand did highlight the need to organize personnel, distribute leadership and develop processes that have the biggest impact on student achievement. Teachers in District A were emphatic about the need for the principal of their school to possess the leadership capabilities to hire the *right* teachers for the school. The "right" teacher to this group (six teachers) included educators who were resourceful, really cared about student achievement, and those that wanted to be part of a strong school family (FG–A). The district listed this recommendation with their strategic goal area IV where their objectives included providing effective professional development for all staff and ensuring teachers received meaningful evaluations.

Culture, climate and organizational efficacy.

The Georgia Vision Project strand labeled Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy highlights recommendations that serve as the overarching umbrella of what identifies the "feel" of a school. Each teacher interviewed in school District A agreed that support, positive relationships, and feeling valued and cared for made a big difference in the way they approached their jobs each day. They had seen a change in the school climate and the community support since the implementation of the GVP; however, they gave credit for the change to the new principal that was hired <u>after</u> the GVP had been implemented as part of the strategic plan. Taking educational risks in planning for instruction and in instructional strategies was a very uncomfortable subject for teachers in

District A because of prior leadership at the school. Under new leadership, a greater sense of security had been nurtured. One teacher leader shared,

> The attitude of the educators in the building comes from the top down. Now, we (teachers in the building) don't feel that we are constantly being scrutinized. By having the opportunity to step away from the cookie cutter, having the opportunities to use professional judgment, and knowing that you have your administrators backing you paves the way for all of us to focus on what we need to do for children (TL-District A).

The district strategic plan included this recommendation under goal area III: Climate. Here, the focal points included *ensuring all schools are inviting* and *ensuring an orderly environment that maximizes student learning.* This represented only two of the seven recommendations provided in that strand. The district's goal area II encompassed the community and school relationships and engagement, however, this strand of the GVP was not cited in the district's strategic plan.

Principal impact.

Teachers in school district A attributed all of the success or failures of the school to the principal. The school was opened in 1990 and the current principal was only the third principal to serve as the leader of the school. The first principal led for six years and the second for seventeen. The current leader was beginning his third year at the school. He shared that he was hired to "get on the ship, find out where it is going, and make the ride smooth" (Principal- District A). Most teachers at this school spend their entire careers at the school. The principal felt that he is able to support the teachers as needed and because of the longevity and the trust, he was able to allow them to experiment with new things without fear of failure. The teachers felt the same way. When asked about the

climate of the school, the principal most always used the subject pronoun, "we". He shared that the climate of the school was simple, it had to be driven by everyone knowing the purpose of the school and that is being there for one reason, and one reason only: the students. While morale was high overall, there had been the stressors of many student assessments. "As the principal, that is not a problem to be fixed. It is the principal's job to listen and to do what can be done to offer solutions and strategies to make things more bearable" (Principal-District A). The principal shared that keeping the focus on helping the children reach their greatest potential in the midst of national, state, and district changes was his biggest job. The teachers interviewed in District A agree.

"The principal is the driving force for the success of the school" (TL2-District A). The focus group found that the biggest impact their principal had on the climate of the school was his ability to be open to new ideas and allow them to take some risks in their classrooms. When they experienced success, he encouraged them to share with others. When things did not go as well as planned, he strategized with them and helped to find solutions. One individual teacher interviewed shared that the principal's willingness to allow the teachers to make small decisions (like whether or not to team teach or to be self-contained) really impacted morale and teacher efficacy positively. All teachers interviewed agreed that he listened and flexible making the teachers feel empowered. Another teacher referred to her principal as someone she worked "with" and not "for" highlighting the fact that he was caring and nurturing, but there was never a question that he was the leader of the school. "The fact that his door is always open and that he is approachable to everyone impacts the climate in a positive way" (TL2-District A). According to one teacher, the principal modeled positive relationships and because of this, the community, the students, the parents, and the teachers had a more positive

outlook. Both the focus group and the teachers shared that the principal fostered a collaborative mentality, which was not part of their school with the previous administration. "The expectation is that we work together, support each other, and do what is best for children" (TL2-District A). All teachers interviewed in District A reiterated the importance of knowing the principal cares and is willing to support and value them.

District B.

In reviewing the educator responses to the interview questions with School District B, the findings were very similar to the responses from School District A. Again, the opinions of eight professional educators were gathered in School District B on the subject of school climate, the principal's impact, and the impact of the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education (GVP). While the years of experience of those interviewed in District A were spread out more evenly over an average career span of 30 years, those interviewed for District B were clustered between eighteen and twenty-five years. However, their area of service was the same (six classroom teachers, one principal, and one district office leader). The GVP begins with an overarching general recommendation to promote public education and to promote the successes of students and schools. District B developed a school improvement plan consisting of four Strategic Goal Areas (a) High Quality Instruction, (b) Stakeholder Engagement, (c) Organizational Effectiveness, and (d) Building Capacity for Continued Improvement. Once this document was complete it was distributed to each employee as a one page "tent" that could easily be displayed as a reference. Then, after a series of conversations, it was suggested that the district office go a step further and actually line the strategic plan with the Georgia Vision Plan recommendations. So, the Georgia Vision Project was not used

in developing the strategic plan for District B, it was used more as a checks and balances process. Initially, the direction for this process was not clear, but once the district realized their thinking in determining the direction of the district in regards to student achievement, the pieces fell into place and most of the strategic goals and action steps were lined up with at least one GVP recommendation.

Three recommendation strands in the GVP were not evident to this study. Those strands included, *Early Learning and Student Success*, *Governance, Leadership and Accountability,* and *Financial Resources*. While School District B does serve children in early childhood, there is no match up between the district strategic plan and the first strand of the GVP.

Teaching and learning.

The next GVP strand, *Teaching and Learning*, proved to be somewhat evident to the work in District B. This strand includes teachers working and planning together in an environment in which they are supported, teachers using a variety of technologies to teach and assess students, teachers challenging students and providing flexibility for those students who need additional assistance and those who need enrichment, and teachers using a variety of assessments to determine what children have mastered. The principal, the individual teachers, and the teacher focus groups mentioned the need for and opportunities given for working in professional learning communities. The focus group in school district B was quite vocal on the impact the new principal had on teaching and learning. Recommendation 4.1 in the GVP states, *In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teacher's work and plan together, learn and share effective teaching practices and are provided support for their on-going learning.* One teacher in the group shared, "I've worked under four different principals

and he's the first one that genuinely cares about student learning. He encourages us to work together in teams, he values our opinions, and he provides us with whatever professional development we need" (FG-District B). When the educators at the school level were asked how the internal and external environments impacted learning and whether or not specific features of the GVP inspired long-term goals, the teachers continued to use the phrase, *providing an environment where students learn best* (which is a phrase that is used in every recommendation in the Teaching & Learning strand in the GVP).

The conversation had a clear theme where Goal 2, Action 1 of District B's strategic plan called for a systematic approach to providing a safe learning environment for all stakeholders. The principal in this district was in his second year at the school. Prior to his appointment, the idea of "family" or working together was not a focus, and at times appeared to be the anti-sentiment. As trust was built with the new leader, the teachers noticed an increased desire to work together and bring together all (including the opportunities for using technology) of the recommendations in the GVP to enhance teaching and learning. There was a negative tone associated with recommendation 4.4 where it is recommended that varied measures (assessments) be used to determine what children know and can do. Everyone interviewed in this district mentioned the overabundance of assessments. The principal in School District A expressed frustration in trying to lead his teachers to use data effectively when they are overwhelmed with so many different assessments. "It is hard to require teachers to use data when the data comes in on the heels of the next assessment" (P-District A). The central office representative in district B stated the concern clearly, "We spent more time this fall weighing the pig than we did feeding it" (CO-District B).

Teaching and learning resources.

Teaching and Learning Resources did enter the conversations during the interviews with educators in District B. The areas in which the strand places an emphasis include:

- determining the most effective instructional strategies where students are engaged in learning,

- ensuring full integration of technology which means training for teachers and implementation for students,

- monitoring student progress,

- implementing appropriate teaching strategies based on needs, and

- developing partnerships with businesses and the community.

Both the individual teachers and the focus group in District B made mention of the fact that their principal let them determine the professional learning needed for their teams and he supported their decisions. They agreed that the district did an outstanding job of providing professional learning within the district. However, they became most passionate about the fact that the new principal actually worked on building relationships throughout the community. This was meaningful in that it provided resources for the students (field trips to local businesses) and to the teachers (incentives). When asked about the features of the GVP that specifically impacted the learning in the school, the principal in District B did not report a specific impact in the school. He did report that the district set up the school improvement plan template based on the recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project, which did not match with what the district office representative shared. It was noted at the district level and the school level that professional learning was a focus. The utilization of this resource impacted classroom

instruction by setting targets for standards-based classrooms and goals that push teachers to work toward their personal best for the students. In addition, Goal 3, Action 4 in District B's Strategic Plan calls for *the assurance of equitable access, reliability, and use of system technology resources.* The teachers in district B further shared that while they do not have the *human* resources they need, they do have the material resources they need for the most part. The main teacher focus regarding this question was on the impact that the new principal had on developing partnerships with local businesses and utilizing those partnerships to enhance student achievement. One teacher in the focus group shared, "He (the principal) practically adopted the cancer center in our community. The kids make cards for the patients and sometimes get to deliver them themselves. Their self-confidence and self-worth soars as does their ability to learn" (FG-District B)

Human and organizational capital.

The main focus of the strand, *Human and Organizational Capital,* is about finding viable candidates for teacher prep programs, evaluating those programs, and hiring highly effective teachers to maximize student achievement. While teachers did not see the impact of this recommendation personally, the principal and district office representative did mention the relationship with the local college and the training of their recruits. This partnership allows for an increased amount of "clinical" practice, and the students at this college are allowed to sign up for in-county professional learning. There are two goal areas in District B's strategic plan that appear to be tied directly to this strand in the GVP. Goal 3, Action 6 calls for the recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff, and Goal 4, Action 2 calls for the facilitation of job-embedded professional learning based on specific needs of personnel.

Culture, climate and organizational efficacy.

The Georgia Vision Project strand labeled *Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy* highlights recommendations that serve as the overarching umbrella of what identifies the "feel" of a school. The first recommendation includes the development of a safe, orderly and supporting environment where respect and encouragement are obvious so that the adults working in the school all make a positive difference in the lives of the children. As with School District A, each teacher interviewed in school district B agreed that support, positive relationships, feeling valued and cared for, and an overall safe environment made a big difference in the way they approached their jobs each day. The implementation of the GVP did not surface as a result of the change they had seen in the school climate and the relationships with the community. They, too, cited the principal as having the biggest impact on the culture and climate of the school community. It was specifically noted that the new principal cared greatly about stakeholder perceptions and worked tirelessly to get the community stakeholders into the school and involved with the students. When asked how the GVP informed the working and learning environment in the school (culture, climate, and organizational efficacy), he replied,

> I came into this building as principal letting the staff know that family was important…school family. I knew we had to have a vision and I knew that the district had a template for an improvement plan. My vision had everything to do with all stakeholders having a part of our strategic plan so my number one goal coming in was to build a family…to work on the climate and culture of the building. I'm not sure if my motivation subconsciously came from the Georgia Vision Project or not (Principal-District B).

While the Georgia Vision project is not specifically mentioned in the strategic plan, there is evidence that the goals and recommendations correlate. Both recommend

the assurance of a safe learning environment and both specifically call for strategies to increase community participation within the school. There is no mention in District B's strategic plan of the development of a culturally sensitive and responsive environment, which is recommendation six in the GVP strand labeled culture, climate & organizational efficacy.

Principal impact.

The principal of the school studied in District B was beginning his second year as the leader of the school and shared that he came in with a focus on building a positive culture and climate in the school. He brought in the theme "family" and set out to lessen the teachers' stress regarding assessments. The spring prior to his first year, he sat down with the staff and asked them three questions: "What do you love? (I'm not going to touch it); What needs tweaking? (Let's tweak it together); and "Oh my goodness, we've got to change this!" (Principal District B, 2015). This principal stressed the importance of letting this group of teachers have a voice because it is something they had not had in the past. The principal in District B emphasized the importance of building positive relationships because in his opinion, everything in a school feeds off positive relationships with all stakeholders. Interestingly, his first mission was to improve the "feel" of the building. He wanted it to be brighter and more student friendly. His vision included putting photographs of the children (candid photographs) throughout the building. The teachers, parents, students, and community immediately noticed a difference in the how the building felt upon entry. The teachers in this school immediately remarked on how the school climate had changed under the current principal. One teacher leader in the school remarked, "The principal determines the

school climate. When you have an environment where the principal truly cares about how the teachers feel, the teachers are going to go the extra mile" (T1–District A).

Discussion.

Demographically, School District A and School District B seem to be very different, and District A's obvious implementation of the Georgia Vision Project for Education (by matching the recommendation strands in their strategic plan for improvement) is different than School District B's implied use of the Georgia Vision Project for Education (by using it as a checks and balance after the strategic plan had been written). However, based on interview responses and other documentation, both districts agree that the recommendations listed under *Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Learning Resources, Human and Organizational Capital and Culture, Climate, and Educational Efficacy* have made a difference in the success of the districts as a whole. Both District A and District B also believe that the principal of a school has a prominent impact on the development of a positive school climate. Table I in Appendix B shows a brief comparison of the school districts' input on each of these strands.

The purpose of this research was to determine the impact of the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project into two different school districts, to determine what features of the Vision Project had specifically impacted learning in the school, to determine how the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project had helped build capacity of self and others in the school, and to determine what the principal does specifically that impacted the climate and organizational efficacy in the school. The findings are important because there was evidence that the recommendations of the Georgia Vision for Public Education served as a guiding reference offering valid recommendations to improve learning, to build capacity of self and others within a school

district, and to educate school principals regarding what they can do to develop and maintain a positive school climate.

A cross-case analysis clarified answers to the research questions. The findings in this study were numerous. For RQ1, it found that the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in District A by tying each of their strategic goals to one or more of the Georgia Vision Project standards. The strategic plan goals are listed along with the Vision Project strands on the county website, but the one page, easy to read document given to all employees does not list the vision standards. At the school level, evidence of the Vision Project's impact was not as obvious as it was at the district office. The principal walked through the strategic plan and noted the Vision Project recommendations and noted the many processes in place (including the monthly impact checks, and the overall general focus) since the implementation of the Georgia Vision Plan. Neither the individual teacher interviews nor the focus group were able to pinpoint evidence of the Georgia Vision Project; however, they did note the impact of a positive climate as established by the principal and the availability of leaders at the district level as two things that impacted teaching and learning in their schools. In District B, the impact was not much different than in District A. One of the district's Board members served on the committee to come up with the recommendations offered in the GVP. It was important that the strategic plan be aligned with the state's expectations as well as the recommendations of the GVP, which made it easy to follow and understand at the school level. However, the recommendations offered in the Georgia Vision Project were used after the strategic plan was complete as a checks and balance process. Whereas, the strategic plan in District A was completed along with the Vision Project recommendations to ensure there were no gaps in their plan.

The features of the Vision Project specifically impacted learning (RQ2) in District

A as evidenced by keeping the district's emphasis on the strategic plan and therefore

setting the foundation for a culture of <u>student learning</u> to develop. The district office

interviewee reported that having the recommendations listed under goal areas of the

strategic plan helped to maintain focus on those goals. If the goals were not met (as

evidenced by monthly impact meetings) then the specific recommendations of the Vision

Project were utilized to regain focus. In District B, the Vision Project specifically

impacted learning and leadership in a similar way (RQ2). New district office leadership

had come into play in District B since the implementation of the Vision Project and the

new leadership differed greatly from the old. The district office representative could not

give credit to the Georgia Vision Project for the changes, but noted a marked difference

in the morale of the district overall. The principal interviewed felt the same way. His goal

going in as a new principal was to <u>build relationships</u> and he found great <u>support</u> from the

district office partly because *Climate, Culture, and Educational Efficacy* was one of the

strands of the Georgia Vision Project referenced in the district's strategic plan.

Capacity of self and others (RQ3) was enhanced/affected by the Vision Project in

District A as evidenced by their commitment to vertical <u>teams</u>. Building leadership

capacity in this small district was more about how they work and <u>support</u> each other from

school to school than how they grew individually. The assistant superintendent saw

leadership and teacher growth throughout the district as the focus on the system as a

<u>community</u> grew, but was not sure how much was due to the implementation of the GVP.

However, the GVP made the strategic plan more relevant (not just a plan that sits on a

shelf for twelve months) because vertical teams meet each month to check in. Because all

levels focus on the strategic plan that was tied to specific strands of the GVP, they

developed a common language that emphasized growth for the students. In District B, there was no evidence presented to imply that the GVP was instrumental in building capacity throughout the school. The leadership in this district determined that the GVP validated what was already being done in the district. The focus, according to the district office interviewee has been on the new superintendent and the different style of leadership that they are experiencing. Because this superintendent was more of a hands-on, transformational-type leader, motivation throughout the county improved. Teachers and leaders had a newfound energy from the trust, respect, care and concern the received from their new superintendent. This inspired them to want to do better. The assistant superintendent reported the new leader's style of leading emphasized mutual respect and an ability to get in the trenches with all stakeholders. This appeared to have been more influential than the GVP in building capacity of self and others.

In District A, it was found that the principal impacts the climate, culture, and organizational efficacy (RQ4) in the school most often by showing support for learning, nurturing positive relationships, and instilling a sense of value and care for all employees in an overall safe environment. Support for learning was evidenced by the principal's openness to letting teachers take risks with innovative teaching strategies and insisting that they use data to drive decisions about instruction. The overall school climate improved with the current principal in District A because he encouraged collegiality through the development of professional learning communities, and incorporated a leadership style that demonstrated value and respect as well as skills to motivate and inspire all stakeholders within the school and within the community. The focus group of teachers in District A saw the school climate growing more positive when the principal

put a focus on stakeholder engagement with events such as Relay for Life, and family

nights, which involved the entire community.

In District B, it was found that the principal impacts the climate, culture, and

organizational efficacy (RQ4) in the school most often by instilling a sense of "family"

and truly valuing each child and adult in the building. By supporting the teachers and

intentionally building positive relationships (by grading papers, gathering data, and

asking, *What can I do?*), the teachers and the students wanted to work harder.

Limitations.

The case included only two school districts, and within those districts, only two

schools were utilized in the study. As such, the findings will not necessarily transfer to

other schools or school districts, which have committed to the guiding principles in the

Georgia Vision for Public Education. The study focused primarily on the overarching

implementation of the Georgia Vision for Public Education and what the principal does

to impact the school climate. Both principals at the school buildings were relatively new

(one beginning his second year and one beginning his third year) and were both highly

focused on developing a more positive school climate which may or may not have

influenced the answers given to the research questions. Therefore, the findings are not

representative of a comprehensive investigation of every Vision Project recommendation.

Implications for further research.

An investigation of the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project in only one

system, including all schools, would provide wisdom and experience from a variety of

principals as well as their comprehensive understanding of each of the guiding principles

in the Georgia Vision Project and how the implementation had impacted the schools.

With 146 school districts using the GVP as a guide in developing strategic plans for

improvement, an investigation in more than two districts would allow for triangulation across districts, and provide further evidence of the overall impact. An in-depth, longitudinal study with a focus on the project's "immediate steps" as well as "long range steps" would offer insights for other states throughout the United States who are implementing a plan based on the Georgia Vision Project.

Conclusion

The Georgia Vision Project for Public Education is a guiding, leadership document that, in two Georgia school districts provided a working blueprint for school leaders to follow. The strands and recommendations are not intimidating, but instead utilize research-based school leadership strategies that can be painlessly implemented. The idea of the power of a principal's influence can be quite intimidating especially since the direct influence on teachers immediately allows for the indirect (but impactful) influence on students (Herbert, 2011). Teacher perception of their principal in regards to their level of influence is huge, but can be maximized when the principal attends to very basic needs such as providing planning time, having meaningful professional learning, having adequate space, and allowing for shared leadership (Edgerson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006). When these basic needs are attended to and the teacher can focus on student learning, students participate, learn, and obey classroom rules and procedures (Adkins-Coleman, 2010). Research supports that the direct influence teachers have on student work is a result of the principal's direct influence on teachers and how they perceive themselves as educators; thus principals' indirect influence has a substantial effect on student engagement and achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2000; Leithwood & Janzi, 2000; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Kosciw, 2013; Lehman, 2015).

The practical implications gained from this research included the utilization of the Georgia Vision Project when developing strategic improvement plans. Whether implemented formally or informally it can be instrumental in serving as a guide to building a meaningful plan for improvement with which all stakeholders can resonate. Interviews at the central office and building level emphasized the guidance that the GVP strands illuminated for both districts. One district used the GVP as a guide to developing a strategic plan and one used the GVP as a checks and balances system to ensure that their plan was inclusive.

The literature offers evidence that effective school leadership is influential (Gulsen & Gulenay, 2014; Hsin-Hsiange &Mao-neng, 2015; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). When principals are perceived by their staffs as being a leader of influence they see competence in overall knowledge and curriculum, the ability to build relationships both in the school and within the community, and an overarching support that includes powerful professional development and sincere care that translates to all members of the staff feeling valued (Grobler, 2012; O'Malley, Meagan, Voight, Renshaw & Fklund, 2015). This is a tall order, but as Bruggencate, Luyen, Scheerens, & Sleegers (2012) report, "All leaders experience 'paradoxical' demands or conflicting roles in their work, and the effective leader is able to meet these demands" p. 706.

School building level leaders are responsible for the climate of the school (Cobb, 2014). This research offered a list of attributes helpful in building a positive school climate. Each participant or team in research interviews (district office, principal, teacher leaders, teacher focus groups) attributed seven leadership qualities that may have a great impact on a school's overall climate positively. In order to build a climate where teachers

enjoy working and students are able to maximize learning, a principal possess the following:

1. Strong leadership skills that emphasize professional learning communities where teacher leaders are developed.

2. The ability to build relationships with teachers and students and the greater community,

3. A focus on student learning,

4. Care and concern for staff members that is a practiced attitude of encouragement and value,

5. The ability to provide support and to be supportive,

6. The confidence to trust teachers to take risks in their classrooms (academic/instructional strategies),

7. A clear vision for where the school is and where it is going.

Cobb (2014) states the needed attributes in two sentences, "Principals drive the direction of school climate. They act as role models for the attitudes and behaviors they wish to see in the teachers and students. Principals set the belief system that all students can achieve to the highest of standards, and they lay the groundwork for a positive and trusting environment" p.16. All seven recommendations in the Georgia Vision Project standard labeled, *Climate, Culture, and Organizational Efficacy* point to one of the four areas of impact (Appendix D – Chart 1) given in the definition of school climate taken from the literature (highlighted in chapter one). Each of those areas falls directly into the hands of the school principal (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006; School Climate, 2014). All of the Georgia Vision Project for Public

Education's strands and recommendations take each of these principal attributes into account in guiding a meaningful strategic plan to lead students to academic success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Interview Protocol

Interview #1 Protocol Questions for System –Level Interviewee

Facts about the System Level Interviewee (demographics):

Gender, age, education background, education background in leadership and

management training, total years as a principal, number of years in current school,

number of years as principal of the current school, leadership positions before becoming

a principal, experience outside of education.

1. What is the background of this school district?
    - o clarification: what is the district's history? How far back?
    - o Tell me about school improvement, principal longevity, and community involvement.
2. Describe the current mission and vision of the school and how this connects to the Vision Project.
3. Describe the culture of the district as it pertains to learning.
4. How has the Vision Project impacted the learning environment in your school?
    - o Specifically, the culture, climate, and organizational efficacy standard of the Georgia Vision Project
5. What long-term learning goals (or strategic plan) have been set for the district, and how are these tied to the Vision Project?
    - o Academic goals?
    - o Culture and Climate Goals
6. What challenges does the school face in strengthening a culture of learning?
    - o How do/will you sustain a culture of learning
    - o How has the implementation of the Vision Project recommendations impacted the culture of learning and overall climate of the school district?

7. How does the internal environment of the central office impact the climate and culture in schools throughout the district?
    - What works?
    - What is missing?
8. How does the external environment of your district (parent, community, policy, political and system/central office stakeholders) impact learning?
    - What works?
    - What is missing?
    - Can you give me specific examples of how the Vision Project has impacted learning
9. How have you developed and distributed leadership throughout the district?
    - Describe principal development provided by the district
    - In what ways has the Vision Project impacted this development
10. What short-term/long-term goals have you set to build capacity at the district level?
    - How have the Vision Project recommendations been integrated into these goals
11. How does the external environment of your district (parent, community, policy (state/federal), political and system/central office stakeholders) influence leadership practices and processes?
    - What works
    - What is missing
12. Some culminating questions:
    - Would you recommend the implementation of the Vision Project's Standards to other systems in regards to its impact on the overall culture and climate in your district?
    - Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been covered?*Interview*
    -

#2 Protocol Questions for School –Principal Interviewee

Facts about the principal/interviewee (demographics):

Gender, age, education background, education background in leadership and management training, total years as a principal, number of years in current school, number of years as principal of the current school, leadership positions before becoming a principal, experience outside of education.

1) What is the background/basic history of the school?

2) How do you describe leadership longevity at this school?

- Prompt: How many leadership changes have taken place over the last ten years? If there have been several changes, describe what you think sparked those changes.

3) How do you describe teacher longevity at this school?

- Prompt: What makes a teacher stay at this school? What makes a teacher leave this school?

4) Describe the current mission and vision of the school and how this connects to the Vision Project.

- Prompt: If there is no connection, do you think the mission and vision need to be directly tied to (same verbage) the Vision Project?

5) How would you describe the current climate of the school?

- Prompt: Does it feel like morale is pretty high? Pretty low? What impacts the "feel" of the school right now? This year?

6) Describe the culture of the school as it pertains to learning.

- Prompt: Is there an overall sense of camaraderie with the staff in regards to working together to ensure a high level of student learning?

7) How has the Vision Project informed the working and learning environment in your school?

- Prompt: Is there a difference in the climate since adopting the Vision Project?
- Prompt: Has there been a change in the overall culture of the school since adopting the Vision Project?
- Prompt: Have you noticed a difference in the organizational efficacy at this school? If so, please explain.

8) What long-term learning goals (or strategic plan) have you set for your school, and how have you tied this to the Vision Project?

- Prompt: When was the last time your school went through the accreditation process?
- Prompt: Do any/each of your reform strategies tag a Vision Project standard?

9) What challenges does the school face in strengthening a culture of learning?

- Prompt: Who would lead the charge in strengthening the culture of learning at your school?

10) How have you developed and distributed leadership in your school?

- Prompt: Describe how your leadership team functions
- Prompt: Do you/each of you personally feel that you have a voice in decision-making?

11)   What short-term/long-term goals have you set to build capacity in your

        school?

                •   Prompt: What do you want for your school that you do not have?

                •   Prompt: Has the school team set a goal/goals to get this?

12)   How does the external environment of your school (parent, community,

        policy, political and system/central office stakeholders) influence leadership

        practices and processes?

                •   Prompt: Does it appear that there are strong, positive relationships in

                    regards to your school, outside of your school (parents, community,

                    political, central office)?

Interview #3 Protocol Questions for Teacher Focus Group

1) How does the internal environment of your school impact learning?

    a. Do you get a sense that most of the children enjoy coming to school each

        day?

    b. What are team relationships like at this school?

2) How does the external environment of your school (parent, community, policy,

    political and system/central office stakeholders) impact learning?

    a. Are you aware of community partnerships with your school? Tell me

        about them.

    b. Do you feel support from your central office in regards to resources that

        impact learning?

3) How does the principal make the school an inviting place for all stakeholders?

a. If you cannot think of specifics regarding your principal, describe how the "perfect" principal would make a school an inviting place for all stakeholders.

4) What steps does the principal take to determine stakeholder perceptions of the school?

a. Are there any special community meetings?

b. Does your principal hold meetings for stakeholders where they gather informally to discuss school items?

5) Is your principal intentional in involving the community?

a. Share times community advocates are in your school or involved in school activities.

6) How does your principal develop a culture that fosters innovation and responsible risk taking?

a. Do you feel comfortable asking your principal if you can do something nonconventional (in the name of learning)?

7) How does your principal infuse an attitude of educational equity into the school culture?

a. What does educational equity mean to you?

b. Has it changed over the years and with different leadership?

8) What steps does your principal take to ensure a safe, orderly, and supportive learning environment that is built on respect and encouragement?

a. Talk about discipline school-wide

b. Can you speak intelligently about your school'

9) What long-term goals have the stakeholders of the school set that are specifically tied to the vision project in regards to *Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy*?

    a. Do you have a meeting or meetings involving a representation of all stakeholders? When/What is this meeting?

10) Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been addressed?

Potential follow-up interviews with focus groups, individuals, and school leaders will be included in the data collection process. After each interview/focus group session, the participants will be acknowledged, thanked, and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Interview #4 Protocol Questions for Teacher Leaders

1) How does the internal environment of your school impact learning?

2) How does the external environment of your school (parent, community, policy, political and system/central office stakeholders) impact learning?

3) How does the principal make the school an inviting place for all stakeholders?

4) What steps does the principal take to determine stakeholder perceptions of the school?

5) Is your principal intentional in involving the community?

6) How does your principal develop a culture that fosters innovation and responsible risk taking?

7) How does your principal infuse an attitude of educational equity into the school culture?

8) What steps does your principal take to ensure a safe, orderly, and supportive learning environment that is built on respect and encouragement?

9) What long-term goals have the stakeholders of the school set that are specifically tied to the vision project in regards to *Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy*?

10) Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been addressed?

Potential follow-up interviews with focus groups, individuals, and school leaders will be included in the data collection process. After each interview/focus group session, the participants will be acknowledged, thanked, and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Table 1

Comparison Table Showing Summarized Interview Responses that Tie Directly to the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education

This table shows a summarization of each counties input regarding the recommendations found in the GVP strands relevant to this study

School District A	School District B
District Strategic Plan includes five goal areas each tied to one or more GVP recommendations. GVP was used to develop the District Strategic Plan.	*District Strategic Plan includes four goal areas. The GVP was more of an afterthought and was used as a checks and balances type of strategy*
TEACHING & LEARNING 1. The principal is in charge or teaching and learning and the principal makes it happen. 2. Teaching and learning was discussed in each interview and deemed important to the success of the students. 3. The use of technology was not mentioned in regards to the GVP recommendations in the teaching and learning strand. 4. Student learning ranked fifth in a list of twenty different themes.	**TEACHING & LEARNING** 1. Teachers need support and time from their principals to participate in professional learning communities. 2. Children must be provided with an environment where they learn best (safe and happy) 3. There should be a clear plan for providing a safe place for all stakeholders at the school. 4. Technology is an important part of teaching and learning in the school. 5. Student learning ranked eleventh in a list of twenty different themes.
TEACHING & LEARNING RESOURCES 1. The district office is relatively small and does not have academic coordinators, which is a resource District A desires. 2. In interviews with principals, district office personnel, individual teacher leaders, and a four-member teacher focus group, only principals and the four-member focus group mentioned the need for quality professional learning. 3. The importance of teaching and learning resources is listed in the strategic plan for this district and is tied directly to the GVP.	**TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES** 1. Teachers value the ability to choose their own professional learning (based on trust from the principal). 2. Individual teachers and the members of the four-person focus group all mentioned the importance of quality professional learning if they have input and if the principal supports it. 3. Teachers see the district as a positive resource for professional learning. 4. The best teaching and learning resource identified by the interviewees (teachers) was the principal being able to build relationships outside of the school. 5. Interviewees shared no specific impact of the GPV. 6. District level and school level

School District A	School District B
TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES **Continued…**	**TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES** **Continued…** interviewees saw a positive impact on teaching and learning when quality professional learning is in place.
HUMAN ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL 1. Those interviewed in District A were emphatic about the principal of the school building having impeccable hiring skills. The principal should be capable of looking at character, chemistry, and competency (very important to all six teachers). 2. This is part of goal area IV of the district's strategic plan.	**HUMAN ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL** 1. Principal and District office interviewees mentioned the work on building a relationship with the local college and gathering their input on training teacher candidates. This allows them to provide more clinical practice and it allows the college students to participate in district professional learning before they interview or become an employee. 2. This is part of goal 3, action 6 and goal 4, action 2 in the district's strategic plan.
CULTURE, CLIMATE & EDUCATIONAL EFFICACY 1. All teachers agreed that support, positive relationships, and feeling valued and cared for made a difference in the way they approached their jobs each day. 2. Teachers gave some credit to their positive climate to the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education. 3. Ultimately said that with the Georgia Vision Project or not, the principal made the biggest difference in the school's climate. 4. This strand of the Georgia Vision Project is mentioned in the district's strategic plan.	**CULTURE, CLIMATE & EDUCATIONAL EFFICACY** 1. All teachers agreed that support, positive relationships, and feeling valued and cared for made a difference in the way they approached their jobs each day. 2. The Georgia Vision Project for Education was not mentioned during the interviews with this district. 3. The recommendations in this strand of the Georgia Vision Project are mentioned in the strategic plan in goal 2, action 1 and action 4 (however, there is no mention of the Georgia Vision Project).

School District A	School District B
PRINCIPAL IMPACT	**PRINCIPAL IMPACT**
1. Principal and teachers all believe that the principal of the school has ultimate control over the climate of the school (the principal is the driving force). 2. Teacher longevity builds a level of trust that allows for teachers to take risks in the classroom that enhance teaching and learning. 3. It is the principal's responsibility to keep the focus on helping children reach their greatest potential.	1. Both principal and teachers believe that the principal's initial main focus should be on building a positive school climate. 2. The principal sees his responsibility is to lessen the stress that teachers have about assessments and to impart a family atmosphere within the school. 3. Both principal and teachers believe that a principal who allows teachers to have a voice builds positive relationships and positive relationships ultimately impact student achievement. 4. Teachers believe that the principal makes or breaks the climate in a school. If he cares and is willing to work with the staff, the climate is positive.

Appendix C

Coding Worksheet
Words Commonly Used During Interview Sessions
Table II

Commonly Used Words	Individual Teacher Interviews	Principal Interviews	Focus Group I	Focus Group II	Central Office	Totals
Caring/concerned	**32**	**1**	**15**	**16**	**0**	**64**
Collaborative	**0**	**13**	**5**	**3**	**1**	**22**
Community/team	**20**	**14**	**9**	**3**	**8**	**54**
Expectations	**3**	**12**	**4**	**5**	**5**	**28**
Family	2	3	6	6	0	17
Feel(ing)	**15**	**2**	**14**	**11**	**4**	**46**
Focus	0	11	2	0	6	19
Goals	**0**	**8**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**16**
Learning	**5**	**15**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**29**
Positive	**6**	**7**	**7**	**5**	**0**	**25**
Principal/Leadership	**43**	**48**	**41**	**23**	**17**	**172**
Professional Learning	**3**	**5**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**13**
Relationships	**1**	**2**	**3**	**3**	**6**	**15**
Respect/Trust/Risk Taker	**11**	**6**	**5**	**7**	**1**	**30**
Stakeholders	9	2	2	0	0	13
Success for Everyone	**6**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**0**	**16**
Support/Supportive	**7**	**4**	**7**	**9**	**6**	**33**
Vision	**2**	**9**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**16**
Work(ing)	**0**	**12**	**4**	**6**	**3**	**25**

GREEN – 5 of 5 Groups Included the Word

BLUE – 4 of 5 Groups Included the Word

Yellow – 3 of 5 Groups Included the Word

Top Six Commonly Used Words	Words Used by All 5 Groups
Principal Leadership***	Community/Team***
Caring/Concerned	Expectations
Community/Team ***	Feel(ing)***
Feel(ing)***	Principal Leadership***
Support/Supportive***	Relationships
Trust/Respect/Risk Taker***	Trust/Respect/Risk Taker***
Student Learning***	Support/Supportive***
	Vision
	Student Learning***

THEMES

Principal Leadership
Community/Team
Feel(ings)
Support/Supportive
Trust/Respect/Risk Taker
Care/Concern
Student Learning

Themes derived from the words most commonly used that were also mentioned by all five groups. One exception, caring/concerned was included because it was the second largest word used overall.

Appendix D

Georgia Vision Project

2.0 General

2.1 Promote public education as the cornerstone of American democracy by publicizing student and school successes through all available media.

3.0 Early Learning & Student Success

3.1 Create, in each county of the state, an early learning partnership that includes all public and private human service organizations.

3.2 Create public-private partnerships in local communities between local businesses and educational and human services organizations for the purpose of supporting early childhood initiatives that address healthy child/family development and economic benefits to the community.

3.3 Adopt a statewide awareness and engagement initiative to ensure that high quality early childhood education is a top priority for the state.

3.4 Provide opportunities for all children from birth to five-years-old to participate in high quality learning experiences that are designed to promote all aspects of a child's development, whether provided by families in the home or through a licensed public or private program.

3.5 Align developmental and academic standards for all children from age birth through 8 years old to provide a continuity of learning experiences and personal growth.

3.6 Ensure adequate financial support for the implementation of quality programs for all young children.

4.0 teaching & learning

4.1 In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teacher's

work and plan together, learn and share effective teaching practices, and are provided support for there on-going learning.

4.2 In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers use a varieties of technologies to teach and measure what students know and can do.

4.3 In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers teach challenging and problem-solving lessons that are flexible enough to meet the interests and needs of individual students.

4.4 In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers use varied measures to determine what students know and can do.

5.0 teaching & learning resources

5.1 Evaluate and utilize the most effective instructional models and learning supports (i.e. digital, blended, competency, virtual, etc.) implemented by school districts.

5.2 Ensure full integration of current technology and training into the classroom.

5.3 Continue to develop and maintain a comprehensive data system for monitoring student progress (Pre-K–12) and making decisions to improve educational practice.

5.4 Develop partnerships with business, industries, public agencies and the community to promote shared use of services and facilities.

6.0 Human & Organizational Capital

6.1 Identify and recruit the most talented candidates into teacher preparation programs.

6.2 Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of teacher and leader preparation programs.

6.3 Collaborate with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the Georgia Department of Education and other credentialing agencies to provide comprehensive strategies to find, grow and keep the most talented educators.

6.4 Evaluate the effectiveness and viability of the pilot teacher and leader compensation programs.

6.5 Organize personnel, distribute leadership and implement processes that maximize student learning.

7.0 governance, leadership & accountability

7.1 Develop and implement at the local school district level an accountability system based on local district educational goals that are aligned with state educational goals and state accountability system, and which include clearly defined measures of school district, school and student success.

7.2 Pursue all local and state options to provide for the equitable, effective and efficient delivery of instruction to all students in Georgia regardless of where they reside.

7.3 Change and streamline the process by which local school districts obtain flexibility from state mandates so it is based on school and district performance expectations outlined in the district's strategic improvement plan and takes into account the needs, resources, and characteristics of the local community.

7.4 Establish and maintain high performance organizations through development of local school district governance and leadership teams.

7.5 Streamline and align the agencies with jurisdiction over components of the education enterprise and to whom local school districts of the state must answer.

7.6 Change the method of selection of the state superintendent of schools.

7.7 Change the method of selection of members to the state board of education to non-partisan election of one member from each congressional district for a term of office of even-numbered years by persons in each congressional district qualified to vote for members of the General Assembly.

7.8 Change the method of selection of members of local boards of education from a choice between partisan and non-partisan elections to non-partisan elections only.

8.0 culture, climate & organizational efficacy

8.1 Develop safe, orderly, supportive learning environments built on respect and encouragement where all individuals believe they can make a positive difference.

8.2 Make each school and school system an inviting place to be for students, parents, staff and the larger community.

8.3 Establish each school as the center or hub of the community in which it exists.

8.4 Determine stakeholder perceptions of schools and school districts.

8.5 Develop a culture and climate that foster innovation and responsible risk-taking.

8.6 Develop school and district cultures that are sensitive and responsive to the cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic make-up of the communities they serve.

8.7 Get to know and be willing to truly listen to the students in our schools.

9.0 financial resources

9.1 Expand both the scope and duration of the work of the Special Council on Tax Reform and Fairness for Georgians for the purpose of comprehensively reviewing the state tax structure and identifying ways that it can be strengthened.

9.2 Identify in both state and local budgets for public education sufficient fiscal resources for implementing both a comprehensive data system and an evaluation system that uses data to measure and improve effectiveness in meeting objectives for enhanced student learning.

9.3 Initiate an ongoing process at the local school district level for systematically evaluating all expenditures to enable the development and adoption of budgets that are focused on district strategies for maximizing student learning.

9.4 Provide a high level of flexibility to local school districts in decision-making authority about the most effective strategies for the expenditure of funds to enable all students to be successful in school, coupled with appropriate methods for evaluating school and district success and for implementing positive state interventions where they are found to be needed.

9.5 Implement a cohesive and stable mechanism for the financial support of early learning programs and services for children ages 0 to 5 at a level that prepares all of Georgia's youngest citizens for success in their subsequent school years.

9.6 Provide the most optimal partnership between the state and local school districts in sharing the responsibility for financial support of public education, while ensuring that disparity in local fiscal capacity does not impede the implementation of Vision Project recommendations in all Georgia districts.

9.7 Provide an ongoing level of state financial support for public education which, when combined with local revenue available to boards of education, makes the attainment of our Vision for Public Education in Georgia a reality and ensures its sustainability (gavisionproject.org).

GEORGIA VISION PROJECT FOR EDUCATION
Climate, Culture & Educational Efficacy

**Comparison to the Four Areas (found in the literature)
that impact Climate**

Vision 8.1	Vision 8.2	Vision 8.3	Vision 8.4	Vision 8.5	Vision 8.6	Vision 8.7
Develop safe, orderly, supportive learning environments built on respect and encouragement where all individuals believe they can make a positive difference.	Make each school and school system an inviting place to be for students, parents, staff and the larger community.	Establish each school as the center or hub of the community in which it exists.	Determine stakeholder perceptions of schools and school districts.	Develop a culture and climate that fosters innovation and responsible risk-taking.	Develop school and district cultures that are sensitive and responsive to the cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic make-up of the communities they serve.	Get to know and be willing to truly listen to the students in our schools.

CLIMATE
Four Areas Found Commonly in Literature with
Vision Project Correlations
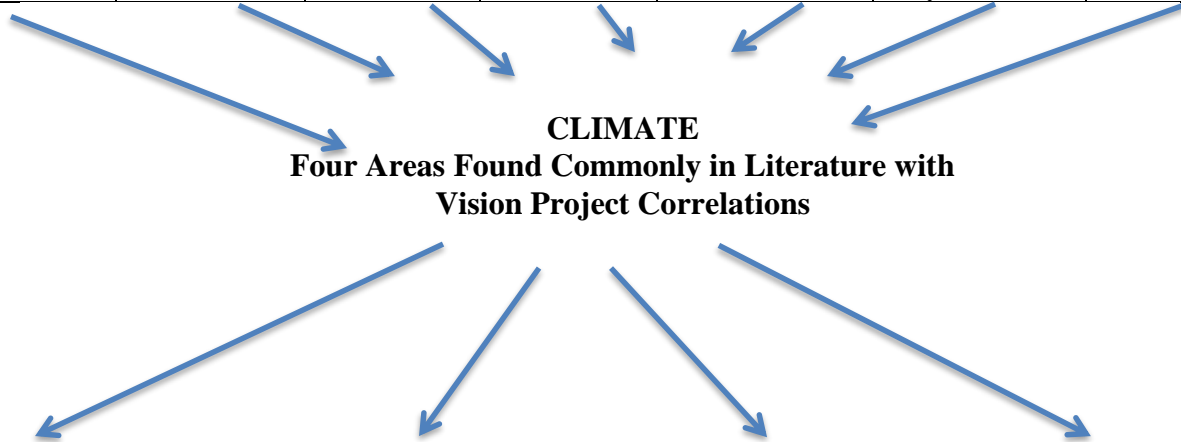
Support for Learning	Stakeholder Engagement	Collegiality	Principal Leadership
Vision 8.1, 8.2, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7	**Vision 8.3, 8.4, 8.6**	**Vision 8.2, 8.3, 8.5, 8.6**	**Vision 8.1,8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7**

PRINCIPAL

Appendix F– District Strategic Plan Comparison to GVP Standards

Georgia Vision Project Standards	School District A Evidence of GVP Standards in Strategic Plan	School District B Evidence of GVP Standards in Strategic Plan
General		
Early Learning & Student Success	Strengthen partnerships with parents and community in supporting student learning outcomes.	
Teaching and Learning	We will teach the State Performance Standards with fidelity	Ensure that each school in District B provides high-quality instruction aligned with state standards.
Teaching and Learning Resources	• We will monitor the progress of our students while working collaboratively using our Data Team Process • We will ensure that all teaching and learning activities reflect a shared understanding of what students should know, do, and understand and are built around a common framework for instruction.	• Develop and execute individual school strategic plans designed to demonstrate growth on the college and career readiness performance indicator. • Implement a balanced assessment approach to include diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to design and adjust instruction. • Tailor student learning opportunities focused on student-centered learning, high order thinking, and problem solving to meet individualized learning needs and goals.

Georgia Vision Project Evidence of GVP Standards in Strategic Plan	School District A Evidence of GVP Standards in Strategic Plan	School District B Evidence of GVP Standards in Strategic Plan
Human and Organizational Capital	Ensure that teachers and school leaders continue to sharpen their knowledge and skills of subject-area content and best instructional practices. • We provide professional development for all staff • We will ensure highly effective professional learning for all staff We will ensure that meaningful teacher/leader evaluations are conducted.	Plan, implement, and monitor processes and procedures for organizational effectiveness. • Provide a safe and efficient transportation program for all students. • Provide students and staff with healthy-nutritious, and appetizing meals in an environment that promotes learning. • Plan, construct, and maintain schools, classrooms, and facilities. • Ensure equitable access, reliability, and use of system technology resources. • Ensure efficient resource management, including fiscal and human capital • Recruit and retain highly qualified staff.

Georgia Vision Project Standards	School District A Evidence of GPV Standards in Strategic Plan	School District B Evidence of GVP Standards in Strategic Plan
		• Build capacity for continuous improvement by ensuring meaningful and in-time professional learning that increases personnel effectiveness and student achievement.
Governance, Leadership & Accountability	We will increase participation in courses and programs that prepare students for post-secondary education	
Climate, Culture & Organizational Efficacy	Ensure that all schools are inviting • Our classroom environment will be built on strong student/teacher	• Ensure a systematic approach to providing a safe learning environment for all stakeholders. • Facilitate on-going,

	relationships, the needs of our students, established routines and procedures, displayed standards, essential questions or "I Can" statements, and key vocabulary, evidence of student work that is engaging and reflects state standards.	two-way communication through multiple forms of media. • Provide opportunities for shared-decision making among all stakeholders. • Increase strategic partnerships with business, post-secondary institutions, and community leaders to support student learning and college and career readiness.