


2015

# Elementary School Teacher Perceptions of Factors Influencing Teacher Morale

Dyna M Chambers  
*Walden University*

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Dyna Manogin Chambers

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Walden University  
2015

Elementary School Teacher Perceptions of Factors Influencing Teacher Morale

by

Dyna Manogin Chambers

MA, DeVry University, 2008

BS, DeVry University, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

September 2015

## Abstract

The 28<sup>th</sup> annual MetLife survey of 1,001 American teachers in the United States indicated that low teacher morale is a common problem faced by many public schools. In one public elementary school located in a Southern state, the teacher attrition rate increased from 30% to 40% within 2 years. The purpose of this mixed method study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of morale and their perceived factors that influence low morale at the school. Maslow's theory of motivation was used to understand the impact of teacher satisfaction on teachers' morale and self-motivation for leading change. The research questions were focused on teachers' perceptions of morale, teachers' perceptions of factors that influence their morale, and teachers' suggestions of what could be done to improve their morale. Data were collected through surveys and interviews with 25 study participants who were selected via convenience and purposeful sampling. Descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the quantitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed for emergent themes. Data analysis showed that teacher morale was low. Teachers identified support, leadership, and motivation as factors that influenced their morale. They also suggested that support, leadership, and motivation could improve their morale. These identified factors were used to inform a 3-day professional development training focused on leading change and teacher leadership through participative leadership. Teaching participative leadership might promote positive morale for the principal and teachers. These actions could contribute to positive social change by building leadership capacity and sustaining high levels of morale among school personnel to increase student achievement and teacher retention.

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## Dedication

I am honored to dedicate this scholarly work to my mother, Mildred Inez, whose love, devotion to family, and her “Most Pleasing Personality” inspired my life.

## Acknowledgments

This is a grateful moment in my life! I would like to acknowledge the many people who were supportive and instrumental in helping me to achieve my professional goal of earning my doctorate degree. First, I acknowledge my mother, Mildred Inez, who encouraged me to earn my doctoral degree. Next, my husband, Gregory Chambers, who supported me with his unconditional love and my children, Gregory D. Manogin, Gerard D. Manogin, and Tarae Nixon Manogin, for their love and patience, and my brother, William Leonard Gale. I acknowledge the friendship and sisterhood I share with Dr. Michelle King, Dr. Tasha Youmans, and Dr. Jessylen Age. I thank my committee chairperson, Dr. Kathleen Bushman, for her wisdom, leadership, and support, and I thank my review committee, Dr. Bindig, and Dr. Patricia Anderson, whose leadership was instrumental in guiding me through my doctoral study.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

The 28<sup>th</sup> annual MetLife survey of 1,001 American teachers in the United States reported that low morale is a common problem faced by many public schools (Heitin, 2012). This low morale problem is present at and has had a profound effect on teachers at the school examined in this study, an inner-city elementary school in a Southern state in the United States. According to the principal, in a 2011 end-of-the-year survey, teachers at the school that is the focus of this study reported feeling stressed and concerned that teacher morale was low.

The school that was the focus of this study was an elementary school that was part of an inner-city school district with 38 elementary schools. The principal also indicated that, in 2015, this district served approximately 30,000 pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade students and employed approximately 2,000 licensed teachers. Nationally, the decline of teacher morale has caused 29% of teachers to report that *they are likely to leave the teaching profession within the next 5 years* (Heitin, 2012, p. 1). According to the principal, teacher retention rate is low and students' test scores declined on both local and state standardized assessments during the 2010 to 2011, 2011 to 2012, and 2012 to 2013 academic years.

The extent of this problem was documented at the school through an end-of-the-year survey conducted by the principal in 2011. Although teachers' responses to the survey indicated their concern for morale, the survey results did not show whether teacher morale was high or low, nor did it identify the factors that influenced teacher

morale. However, the survey results did indicate that the increased teacher turnover rate and declining student test scores might relate to teacher morale. All 21 teachers completed this survey on the last day of school.

The 2011 survey included a total of 11 open-ended questions. There was only one question that addressed staff morale, asking teachers to explain their feelings about morale, which was: What do you think about teacher morale? The principal at the school presented the survey results at the start of the 2011-2012 school years during a leadership team meeting, indicating that 63% of the teachers reported feeling stressed, 21% of the teachers reported being concerned with morale and the school's professional climate, and 6% of the teachers had no comment. These key findings showed that more than 80% of teacher responses felt stressed and concerned with teacher morale. Therefore, the end-of-the-year survey indicated a need to further investigate factors and gaps in practices that impact morale at this school.

The principal's investigation revealed negative concerns from teachers at the school that is the focus of this study. Declining test scores were indicated as having a negative effect on teachers' high stress levels. This decline in scores meant that the school failed to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as dictated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and was categorized as *academic watch* according to the State Department of Education (Kober & Riddle, p.6). The principal of the school reported that teachers expressed an increase in stress levels when the local newspaper issued the state's report card and published each school's accountability grade for the previous year.

Students' test scores are critical in measuring the success of a school based on the state's accountability model (United States Department of Education, 2012). As a result of low student test scores, the principal and teachers at this school felt more pressure to increase student achievement during the new school year. The principal stated that published grades weighed heavily on the performance of teachers, increased teacher absenteeism, increased transfer requests, and increased the number of teacher resignations at the school. There were highlighted concerns from the 2011 survey.

The principal's first concern was the low teacher retention rate at this school. According to Grissom (2011), improving teacher support might decrease the turnover rate. According to the principal of the school involved in my study, during the 2012-2013 academic year, nine teachers resigned out of a total of twenty-one, and an additional four at the end of the year contributed to the existing concerns with teacher morale. According to the principal, also, in a 2-year comparison, the attrition rate of teachers at the school increased from 30 % in 2012 to 40% in 2013. The high attrition rate for teachers at the school was problematic because the goal for the school district was to retain high quality teachers by increasing teacher satisfaction.

Another concern was support for new teachers. Once the principal hires licensed teachers, team leaders must collaborate with the newly hired teacher and provide support. Hiring and supporting new teachers helps to promote teacher satisfaction (Grissom, 2011). The importance of guiding new teachers weighed heavily on team leaders and veteran teachers, according to the principal of the school. New teachers require much

support to successfully impact student learning (Knight & Moore, 2012). However, the leadership team is working with the principal to support new teachers.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of morale and address factors that influence low morale at a Southern elementary school that was part of an inner-city school district with 38 elementary schools. This study includes a review of professional literature where I thoroughly examined current research on teacher morale. The project study findings informed my development of a professional development training plan for the principals and teachers at the school that is the focus of this study. The goals and learning outcomes of my training plan were to identify and implement practices to improve teacher morale and retention.

### **Definition of the Problem**

At the school that was the focus of this study, the district's goal was to retain high quality teachers by increasing teacher satisfaction and improving student academic performance. In order to increase teacher satisfaction and meet the needs of students at the school, teachers' perceptions of low morale needed to be addressed. Heitin (2012) noted that teachers need to share their voice about matters that affect morale. According to Vaezi and Fallah (2011) there is a direct relationship between stress and morale. Teacher stress and burnout are related issues that result in declining morale (Vaezo & Fallah, 2012). Recently, researchers have documented that less-satisfied teachers describe stress as the norm in U.S. schools, according to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Markow & Pieters, 2013). Increasing teacher satisfaction may reduce stress and enhance morale.



This school that was the focus of this study was required to maintain academic standards as measured by Statewide Accountability System on the State Curriculum Test, Second Edition (MCT2) student assessment. This assessment allows the State to comply with the requirements of the federal legislation No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (State Department of Education, 2012). There are numerous issues related to the problem of low morale. With this in mind, to address the local problem of low morale, three-day professional development training has been developed.

### **Rationale**

#### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

As a result of teacher response to an informal end-of-the-year survey developed by the principal at the school that is the focus of this study, teacher morale is a problem. According to a report conducted by the principal of the school in 2011, teachers reported being stressed, and concerned about morale. In this study, I investigated teachers' perceptions of morale. Specifically, I sought to identify the factors that teachers believed contributed to low morale. In this study, teacher perceptions of morale were obtained through a self-administered survey and individual interviews.

#### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

Markow and Pieter (2012) revealed that the United States has experienced an increased rate in low teacher morale. In their quantitative study, the relationship between teacher leadership and the morale levels of teachers were examined in schools (Markow & Pieters, 2012). Markow and Pieter indicated that principal leadership behavior was a source of low teacher morale. In a study on principal leadership, Moore (2012)

recommended that school districts train principals in leadership practices that would enable them to lead their schools to higher levels of teacher morale. Principals were taught how to reduce the stressors that impact the teaching profession. However, Moore (2012) revealed a need for more research in the area of principal leadership and teacher morale.

Markow and Peiters (2012) noted principal leadership as a major reason that teachers experience low morale. Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2011) found “that teachers’ perceptions of school administration had the greatest influence on teacher” morale (p. 303). The morale of teachers is an important factor in teachers’ decisions to remain in teaching profession. Boyd et al. (2011) investigated structural constraints of administration’s lack of support influencing teacher morale and examined the relationship between supportive leadership, teacher retention, and absenteeism. As indicated above, supportive leadership plays an important role in the morale of teachers. Indeed, each year the teacher attrition rates are increasing because teachers are dissatisfied (Boyd et al., 2011). This research suggested that principals are failing to support teachers.

Lack of administrative support from principals negatively affects the morale of teachers and may interfere with teachers’ ability to perform (Penfold, 2011). Buchanan’s (2012) research demonstrated how low morale manifests itself as decreased productivity. Buchanan (2012) noted that low morale of teachers can result in the development of cynical attitudes toward students and education overall. Before this happens, school leaders need to involve teachers in making school decisions; this leads to a more effective

organization and higher staff morale (Wadensango, 2012). In a qualitative study, Cross (2011) examined the principals' role in the retention and turnover of first-time teachers. Cross's study revealed that much can be done at the school level to retain teachers and that a principal should work to provide teachers with a supportive work environment.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Morale:* A combination of positive or negative sentiments, behaviors, and spirits that contribute to general feelings of satisfaction. In addition, morale is demonstrated in the actions of employees based on his or her feelings and confidence, which in turn affect the missions and goals of an organization (Devi & Mani, 2010, p. 1).

*School leaders:* Principals, deputy principals, assistant/associate principals, and master teachers are school leaders with leadership roles in schools (Stuart, Mills, & Remus, 2009, p.733).

*Teacher Leadership:* An action that enhances teaching and learning in a school, and links school and community together to advance the quality of life for students, staff, and community (Ross, Adams, Bondy, & Dodman, 2011).

### **Significance**

This study supports the Walden University mission for social justice and change by providing the local educational community with ways to improve teacher morale to increase teacher retention. Miller (1981) noted that teacher morale has been a long-time concern in education. Teacher morale is important to ensure that teachers perform optimally at all times so that students receive the best possible education (Miller, 1981). Therefore, studying teachers' perceptions of morale may prove useful at this school.

Specifically, teachers at the school that is the focus of this study play an important role in identifying best practices to address low morale. Lau (2013) expressed the need for teachers to become successful change agents in schools. According to Willis and Varner (2010), it is important that teachers identify factors that affect morale. However, some factors may hold more weight based on a teachers' number of years in the profession and the district's politics. The input from teachers offered in-depth understandings to what teachers believe are contributing factors to low morale. Teachers' input has the potential to establish long-term sustainability for teacher and student success by identifying leadership as a gap in practice at the local level.

In addition, this study supports the Walden University mission for social justice and change by providing the local school community with professional development trainings to improve teacher morale in an effort to decrease the teacher turnover rate. When educators collaborate to advance education, they represent mutual inquiry with their students and colleagues. School leaders discover ways to motivate teachers, which might promote positive teacher morale.

In an effort to establish or reestablish high morale, it is important for educational leaders to recognize that the safety needs and job satisfaction of their staff must be met (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2013). Isaiah and Nenty (2012) noted that the allocation of fiscal resources could affect teachers' desires to feel safe through teacher satisfaction, teacher motivation, and teacher performance. Financial matters are an example of teachers safety needs not being met and feeling dissatisfied. According to Maforah and Schulze (2012) employee dissatisfaction posed a challenge when it came to job

satisfaction. Teachers found job dissatisfaction was mainly the result of low salaries and low status in the community (Maforah & Schulze, 2012, p. 227). Teacher attrition was observed in schools with high minority populations (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012). The concept of educators working to improve teacher morale may increase teacher retention, which in turn could increase student achievement.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of morale at the school that is the focus of this study?
2. What do teachers at the school that is the focus of this study perceive as factors that influence their morale?
3. What do teachers at the school that is the focus of this study suggest is done to improve their morale?

A self-administered survey and one-on-one interviews with teachers at the school were the focus of this study. I used these methods to obtain data to answer the research questions and to identify factors that influence low morale. The data that I obtained from this study allowed me the opportunity to design and deliver professional development training to provide the principal and teachers with effective strategies and resources that support participative leadership and team collaboration to promote teacher and student success. The responses to these research questions provided the principal with information to understand teachers' perceptions regarding morale and identified the sources that influenced morale.

## **Review of the Literature**

I conducted this review of the literature based on the problem of low morale at the school that is the focus of this study. Peer reviewed articles from journals associated with teacher morale were examined in order to understand the causes and consequences of low morale in order to explain the theory of motivation related to teacher morale. The resources that I used to develop this literature review were located via the Internet and included peer reviewed journals, as well as primary sources found through Walden's databases, EBSCO, Academic Search Premier, and ERIC. Key search terms included *elementary education, teacher morale, teacher stress, attrition, retention, absenteeism, supportive leadership, team collaboration, and mentoring*. I obtained article sources from digital and print resources published between 2009 and 2014, with the exception of Maslow's theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs model published in 1943. There are references more than five years old that are relative to support the broad problem of morale.

Teachers at the school that is the focus of this study indicated that morale was low. In the literature review, I explored topics related to low teacher morale with a focus on consequences and causes of low morale. The review of literature is divided into two categories: consequences of low teacher morale (retention and absenteeism), and causes of low teacher morale (working conditions and supportive leadership).

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, I used Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs model to support the conceptual framework. Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation

provides the contextual understanding of the impact that teacher satisfaction have on morale and teachers' self-motivation to move to the next level of leading change.

Maslow's hierarchy made a major contribution to education (Milheim, 2012). Maslow's hierarchy of needs are: (a) self-actualization, (b) esteem, (c) motivation, (d) safety and security, and (e) physiological need for survival listed at the bottom that revealed that the physiological need for survival as the largest and most essential need (Maslow, 1943, p.370).

Shaalivik and Shaalivik (2011) noted that lack of support and motivation in a professional climate are related to job satisfaction and reasons to vacate the teaching profession. Maslow's theory helped to define people's need to receive in order to feel satisfied and motivated (Maslow, 1943). Maslow suggested motivating people based on the listed hierarchy of needs: (a) physical needs to survive, (b) needs to feel safe, (c) need to belong, (d) need of self-esteem, and (e) needs for professional growth (p. 370).

Maslow (1943) noted a person's change in behavior when motivated in the home or workplace. Teachers' need for safety and security is listed on Maslow's hierarchy and is one of the most important needs that educational leaders should use to improve morale (Herzberg, 2005). Whitaker, Whitaker, and Lumpa (2013) cited the importance of understanding where teachers are on the pyramid. Finally, leaders motivate teachers in the workplace by understanding teachers' needs. Teachers feel safe when their needs are met and this might result in a higher level of morale (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa (2013).

Herzberg (2005) based his work on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and corroborated Maslow's theory by suggesting that people's ultimate goal is to be self-actualized. The theory acknowledged that teacher morale is affected when teachers are satisfied and motivated. In a study to identify the needs of teachers, Herzberg (2005) recognized that the needs are different for teachers at each grade level. As there is adequate homogeneity within each group (e.g., grade level) Herzberg stated that the importance of focusing on satisfying the needs of all participants via their particular grade level by providing the necessary group support, motivation, and resources. Harris (2013) noted that teacher morale was influenced when principals support teachers. In an effort to understand teacher morale, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model will guide this study based on teachers' perceptions to motivate themselves and to move to the next level.

### **Causes of Low Teacher Morale**

Teacher morale is at its lowest point in the United States (Santos, 2012). The economy's decline combined with the harsh dialogue over student test scores and tenure, have lowered morale to the nation's lowest point in more than 20 years (Santos, 2012). Santos surveyed teachers, parents, and students in New York City and noted that teachers with high job satisfaction felt secure in their jobs. Research conducted by Smith and Royal (2010) cited that teacher morale embraces the essence of how teachers feel about their profession. Harris (2013) reported the importance of "principal leadership and their perceived influence on teacher morale in schools" for motivation (p.66).



**Working conditions for teachers.** Poor working conditions cause teachers to feel dissatisfied at the work place (Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers have a need to feel secure in their work environment (Santos, 2012). While researching teacher morale, the study conducted by the State Department of Education was appropriate to address teacher morale. In 2007, the State Department of Education administered an online survey for licensed educators. New and veteran teachers shared their opinions of working conditions for teachers in the state. Santos (2012) reported educators and policy-makers concerns of teachers as related to teacher morale. Teachers' decisions to remain in education were based on teachers' perceptions of working conditions and morale.

According to Santos (2012), teachers in the state felt that (a) the schools were good places to work; (b) early career teacher were not mention, and those mentored were likely to continue teaching; (c) school leadership was needed to retain and support teachers; and (d) leadership, facilities, and resources had the greatest influences on early career leavers. Teachers require satisfactory working conditions for a variety of reasons. The state Department of Education teacher research identified several factors that influenced low teacher morale. Facilities, resources, and administrative leadership were the leading causes of low morale. New and veteran teachers believed that workplace conditions decided the career intentions and morale (Santos, 2012). Based on findings from the 2010 state Department of Education, new and veteran teachers need support and satisfactory working conditions.

The research reported by Mississippi Department of Education (2012) also indicated that teachers in unequipped classrooms were dissatisfied and considered leaving

the teaching profession. In a study to examine the potential connection of teachers' classroom and their attitudes, Earthman and Lemasters (2009) found that working conditions in a classroom could cause morale problems with teachers. In the study, the authors emphasized the importance for school leaders to know how work conditions impact teacher performance (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). The importance of working conditions highlighted the need for teachers to experience high levels of motivation and satisfaction. The school climate can negatively influence the attitudes of teachers, which then impacts efficiency (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). Earthman and Lemasters (2009) indicated that when working conditions are unsatisfactory; teachers struggle to perform well in the classroom. Teachers' struggles with the poor working conditions can lead to low morale causing teachers to feel stressed and overwhelmed (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009).

**Supportive leadership.** According to Biggs and Tang (2011), supported teachers tend to perform at the highest level for school success. Evers and Jean (2011) used a teacher survey to measure the opinions of state teachers' morale as defined by rapport with principals and job satisfaction. The findings indicated that teacher morale was low because teachers did not agree with principal leadership. Sandhu (2012) reported data obtained with the State Teacher Assessment Instrument that suggested morale is low because of school climate. That is, both principal leadership and the school climate are problematic and may be responsible for low morale. These factors explain how teachers in a Southern state in the United States feel about morale.

Campbell (2011) noted that factors other than the climate of schools and principal leadership may influence the morale of teachers. Communication has a positive impact on teacher morale (Campbell, 2011). Campbell noted that communication and employee morale are critical components of a successful school system. Campbell further indicated that communication is an important aspect of developing relationships. In a study on maintaining high teacher morale, Protheroe (2006) stated that principals should foster nurturing school environments by focusing on learning and supporting the morale of teachers. In addition, Cohen et al. (2010) revealed that principals foster school climate. Protheroe (2006) noted that in a high stakes testing environments, principals should consistently communicate appreciation to teachers for what they do, to achieve higher levels of student learning. Protheroe noted the focus of a principal during high stakes testing is typically to encourage student achievement, and it is not shocking that morale is low in schools, especially during testing time.

There are more concerns that affect positive and negative teacher morale in schools (Byrd et al., 2010). In a study on leadership practices, Owen (2010) noted that teacher absenteeism is affected by teacher morale. Owen suggested that leadership practices in schools affect teacher attendance and low teacher morale. In addition, Dworkin (2010) wrote that principals' behaviors are predictors of high teacher absenteeism and low teacher morale. Changing the behaviors of principals is a re-occurring issue that Crone and Horner (2012) acknowledged to understand the perception of principals. Crone and Horner (2012) indicated that principals' behaviors are at the forefront of teachers' emotional wellness and morale in the school culture.

The reviewed research suggested that the behaviors of principals play an important role in impacting the way teachers feel about going to work and may be exacerbating low morale in schools. Therefore, ensuring that principals address the concern of low morale may help to transform the workplace. Principals have the responsibility of changing school culture by providing teachers with motivation and support. This evidence is a direct indication of the need to research teacher morale and the other contributing factors at an inner-city elementary school.

Teachers that receive adequate support are more likely to remain in education (Gardner, 2010). Based on Gardner's (2010) findings, principals must reach out to teachers by respecting them as professionals, supporting their needs, and encouraging their professional growth. In a study on attracting teachers, Painter, Haladyna, and Thomas (2007) indicated the highest factor new teachers consider when seeking employment is the professionalism of the principal. Potential teachers need school settings that provide support for them and opportunities to collaborate with other teachers.

Bush and Glover (2012) noted that when principals work to develop consensus relative to decision making in the school, teacher satisfaction increases. Bush and Glover further indicated that principals should not meet teacher attitudes with cynicism, instead seek to develop a momentum for change. In the discussion, Bush and Glover (2012) stated the significance of dialogue and implementing ideas into practice in order to improve the school's culture. According to the authors, developing momentum for change might build a trustworthy collaboration between the principal and teachers.

Meyer and Macmilliam (2009) conducted a study of Nova Scotia schools, where teacher morale was impacted by frequent principal turnover. The findings from the study indicated that the introduction of new leadership and changes to the school's culture might positively and negatively affect teachers and institutional morale (Meyer & Macmilliam, 2009). The Meyer and Macmilliam found that change can have a helpful or harmful effect on teacher morale. Sheppard, Hurley, and Dibbon (2010) argued that school leadership can enhance morale through distributed leadership that builds teacher leadership capacity through their involvement in school management. It is important to understand the influence of a new principal and the leadership they provide. In most cases, new principals change school climate (Mitchell & Bradshaw, 2010). Changing the school climate may cause positive or negative behavior from staff. No matter what approach a leader takes, it is critical to understand leadership's role and its impact the morale of teachers.

Again, principals have the responsibility to provide teachers with supportive leadership. In order to do so, principals are charged with providing opportunities and experiences that enhance and develop the morale of teachers. Mills and Niesche (2014) contended that the roles of school principals are important because principals set the tone of the school. Mills and Niesche believed the partnership between the principal and teachers cultivates the school's culture. Access to resources, professional development, and teacher leadership set the tone that influences morale. Principals are assuming the responsibility of setting the school's tone and identifying the collaborative work needed of teachers (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). Maloney and Konza (2011) noted that contributing

to decisions such as resource allocations, professional development, and planning empowers teacher with support. Teachers and principals working together share responsibility for ensuring a positive workplace.

According to Green (2014), the principal and teachers could learn from one another and build rapport with adequate interactions. Green (2014) found that additional support from school leadership improved teacher morale and teacher retention. Teachers viewed work overload (e.g., nonteaching duties and excessive paperwork) to cause job dissatisfaction (Green, 2014). Additionally, teacher satisfaction increases when role overload lessens. Principal leaders working to provide supportive leadership by decreasing the stressors of daily workloads will promote greater job satisfaction and positive morale (Welch, 2014). Teachers' judgments tend to be influenced by the principals' caring and supportive behavior, linking principal leadership to an environment of learning (Leithwood, Louis, & Wahlstrom, 2009).

Studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of supportive leadership. Hallinger's (2011) descriptive study highlights characteristics of effective principals. Results from the study suggested that teachers are looking for supportive principals who make time for listening to concerns and someone with whom they can build a relationship. Hallinger noted successful leadership in schools must incorporate support and communication, which are leadership traits to build relationships within the school. Little and Housand (2011) emphasized the importance of administrative support for teachers. Teachers must have time to express their concerns to principals and this time should not be during his or her evaluation (Little & Housand, 2011).

Boon (2014) studied the complexities of teacher morale in Australia and noted that strategies are needed to improve morale. Boon (2014) cited the difficulty in obtaining positive teacher morale in any school environment. Increasing community assurance in Australian's education system was suggested as a way to embrace positive morale (Boon, 2014). In a study of teachers' perception of principal support and experiences of retention, Russell, Williams, and Gleason (2010) noted teachers threatening to leave the teaching profession and lack of commitment to their job were predictable by lack of administrative support. This would seem to indicate that poor leadership plays an important role in teacher morale.

### **Consequences of Low Teacher Morale**

Studies suggest that many different factors affect teacher motivation and morale. Joo, Lee, and Jung (2012) studied elementary, middle, and high school teachers to investigate how performance based rewards affect motivation, morale, and commitment of teachers. Joo, Lee, and Jung (2012) cited the importance of considering the attitudes and background of teachers. The results of the study indicated that school leaders should be aware of individual teacher characteristics, beliefs, and needs in order to increase motivation. Some education leaders believe extrinsic rewards for teachers will improve teacher motivation (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2013). Joo, Lee, and Jung (2012) acknowledged that principal's awareness of teachers' characteristics motivate teachers and improve morale. Recognition of the need to motivate teachers indicates that school leaders are acknowledging the behaviors of teachers.

Teacher behaviors are a direct reflection of low or high morale. Indicators of low morale correlates with frustration, distress, hostility, and helplessness, while indicators of high morale are contentment, belongingness, success, and personal and group value (Nolan & Stitzlein, 2012). In a qualitative study examining shared leadership among the teachers and the principal, Nolan and Stitzlein (2012) suggested there is significant hope for teachers in stressful times and low morale. This study suggested that educators use distributed leadership to improve morale and provide hope through motivation and support. Principals can use different strategies to motivate teachers and decrease the consequences of low teacher morale.

**Teacher retention.** Teacher retention and morale are concerns of educators (Hong, 2012). Cameron (2011) conducted a study on the attitudes and the need to retain first-year teachers. First year teachers require professional learning to develop the knowledge and of an expert teacher (Cameron, 2011). The study cited the importance of professional learning communities for teachers (Lovett & Cameron, 2011). Based on Cameron's findings, schools reporting low teacher retention rates also experienced low morale.

In the age of accountability, urban schools struggle to retain effective teachers (Davis, 2010). Many urban schools struggle to retain their best teachers. Based on a study to address staffing challenges, Davis (2010) found a relationship between NCLB and retention in urban schools. Results of this study also implicated poor salaries, challenging work environments, and ineffective leadership as negative influences on teacher morale and retention.



There is significant concern regarding beginning teachers leaving schools during their first year of teaching (LeMaistre & Pare, 2010). According to LeMaistre and Pare (2010) educators are working to help beginning teachers deal with the complex problems of practice and survival. First year teachers are leaving the profession at an increased rate every year (Hughes, 2012). Hughes (2012) noted that “33% of elementary teachers leave their schools in the first three years, and 46 % leave after five years” (p. 245). Each year teacher attrition has an economic impact on hiring and training teachers, as this repeatedly makes planning professional development difficult (Hughes, 2012). Based on the findings, Hughes (2012) reported that poor leadership, non-salary-related dissatisfaction, excessive workloads, high-stakes testing, student discipline, and lack of administrative support as causes for teacher attrition. The teachers reported that the retention rates have a direct influence on morale and teachers’ decisions to remain in education (Hughes, 2012).

There are cost efficient solutions for educators to increase teacher retention and to impact morale (Clifford, Behrstock-Sherratt, & Fetters, 2012). Additionally, Sturmfels (2009) identified salary increases, for example, a 20 % pay raise as a solution to address morale. Teachers reportedly remain in education when there is high-quality school climate and professional development (Sturmfels, 2009). Sturmfels established a relationship between morale, incentives, and retention. Teachers’ salaries, workload, and professional development influence retention with the potential to improve morale.

Boyd, Grossman, Ing, and Lankford (2011) studied the relationship between school issues and teacher retention. Teachers’ characteristics were assessed based on

their decisions leave the teaching profession with other teachers in the building. The researchers found that school leaders making teachers' workloads less stressful could improve teaching and the teacher retention rate (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, & Lankford, 2011).

Teacher retention rates are a concern for policymakers. Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2013) noted that school leaders often assume that teacher attrition harms student achievement. Although policymakers have assumed that teacher attrition harms student achievement. The authors noted that teacher attrition does affect student achievement with a disruptive impact on teacher quality. Ronfeldt et al (2013) cited the importance of addressing teacher attrition to improve teacher quality. School leaders are providing professional trainings to address this specific concern of teacher attrition.

The continuing challenge of teacher attrition requires further examination. Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, and Shim (2010) examined teacher turnover in preschool classrooms by examining the experiences of teachers. Cassidy et al (2010) noted that difficult working conditions resulted in low morale and caused schools to experience higher teacher turnover rates. Results showed that elementary classroom teachers identified teacher induction and training as strategies needed to respond to teacher turnover (Cassidy et al., 2010). These strategies could improve working conditions of more classroom resources for teachers. Teacher induction programs will assist in decreasing teacher turnover rate by providing mentors that could improve teacher morale and reduce the risk of low student performance (Kang & Berliner, 2012).

The school district's fiscal operations and student achievement is affected by teachers leaving the classroom (Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010). Change in a teachers' job assignment from year to year is an indicator of teacher turnover (Boe, Cook, & Sutherland, 2008), and the demand it creates a need for teacher replacement. The annual increase in turnover rates is evidence that many schools are experiencing low teacher morale (Boe et al., 2008). To investigate the role school environment has on teachers' dissatisfaction, Moore (2012) used a survey to examine high teacher turnover. The study findings indicated that unhappy teachers might negatively impact the morale of teachers and students. In addition, Moore reported that decreased motivation of students and staff might result in teacher detachment and teachers leaving each school year. Miller (2010) wrote, "The Revolving Door" to explain how leaders impact teacher turnover. Miller (2010) identified three main reasons teachers decide to leave the profession; (1) lack of knowledge of principal on how to be supportive, (2) lack of professionalism to be respectful and, (3) low morale (p.1). The findings from this study indicated that leadership behavior directly influenced teachers' decision exit the teaching profession.

**Teacher absenteeism.** High teacher absenteeism plagues many school districts. Schools in the United States are experiencing an epidemic of teacher absenteeism (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009). In a study to determine if teacher absenteeism was a concern, Clotfelter et al. (2009) studied teachers in North Carolina to understand a principal's role in regulating teacher absenteeism. The study found that teacher absence was less likely to occur in high-income schools and more likely to occur in low-income

schools (Clotfelter et al., 2009). Clotfelter et al. (2009) suggested two interventions for districts to use to decrease teacher absenteeism: increase teacher base salaries and apply penalties for teacher absenteeism. These interventions might encourage teachers to spend more time in the classroom, allowing their students to perform their work without the distraction and disruption of substitute teachers.

Research indicates a relationship between teacher absenteeism and morale as a primary reason for high teacher absenteeism (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). In a study to explore teachers' emotional wellness, Daniels and Strauss (2010) linked low morale and teacher absenteeism. Teachers felt that they were not valued and their self-worth impacted their quality of work, causing an increase of teacher absenteeism (Altinyelken, 2010). Based on the findings of Altinyelken (2010), poor working conditions and an increased absenteeism rate result in low teacher morale.

Teacher absenteeism affects school operations. In a study to examine teacher morale in schools, Smith and Royal (2010) noted that teachers with low morale had a greater use of sick leave. The increased absenteeism rate effected teacher productivity and student achievement Smith & Royal (2010). Study results showed that teachers with high morale had a lower absentee rate. Based on the findings of Smith and Royal (2010), high morale could increase teacher attendance.

Evidence exists that stress is a major determinant of teacher absenteeism (Ejere, 2010). Ejere (2010) noted that the evidence is based on a field study of two hundred elementary school teachers in the Nigerian City of Uyo. Ejere suggested that job satisfaction and positive teacher morale could reduce teacher absenteeism (2010). Poor

attendance rates among teachers have been associated with low morale (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010). The Washington-based National Council on Teacher Quality (2012) estimated that the average teacher misses 6 to 10 days of school each year. In addition, the Washington-based National Council on Teacher Quality (2012) suggested that schools should address the learning loss of students caused by teacher absenteeism and concentrate on improving aspects of school culture such as teacher morale. Focusing on these variables may decrease learning losses that occur when teachers are absent.

The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (2012) reported that hiring substitute teachers costs millions of dollars. In 2012, teachers in the Atlanta Public Schools, Fulton and DeKalb counties were absent on average about 13 days because of stress and low morale (Tagami & Guckian, 2012). According to Tagami and Guckian (2012) 10 days is the national average and teacher morale impacts attendance.

The review of literature suggests that there is a global problem regarding teacher morale as it relates to teacher retention and teacher absenteeism. There are various factors that influence teacher morale; planning time, principal support, recognition, and opportunities for advancement (Willis & Varner, 2010). Fullan (2011) noted principal support has impacted teacher morale more than any other factor. Teachers experience job satisfaction when motivated with support (Shaalvik & Shaalvik, 2011). This supportive leadership could improve teacher morale (Fullan, 2011).

### **Implications**

According to the literature, positive morale for teachers seems to begin with supportive leadership. Providing teachers with supportive leadership appears to be

challenging. Supportive leadership from principals is the essential component needed for teachers to be successful (McClure, 2008). Based on McClure's study findings that examined teacher morale, this study focused on teachers' perceptions regarding factors that influence morale.

This mixed method study provided a theoretical perspective on ways to improve morale. Teachers that are satisfied and motivated might promote teacher and student learning. This study on morale will assist educators, researchers, and evaluators to better understand the need of working together. Sterling (2011) noted that teacher success could increase classroom support, supportive working conditions, and a supportive school culture. Sterling (2011) recommended establishing an assortment of instructional approaches to promote a supportive school cultures that provide time for teachers to collaboratively plan for instruction, acknowledge teacher and student diversity, assess and focus on student learning, reflect on teacher practice, and establish a partnerships in the community. This study has implications for positive social change in schools to improve morale with a professional development framework for school leaders to sustain positive morale for school success.

### **Summary**

In the literature review, I identified possible causes and consequences of low morale. The research and literature supports the need to address the problem of low morale, the increased teacher turnover rate, and their effect of low student test scores and student achievement. In Section 2, I discuss the methodology used to collect and analyze data related to the problem of low morale and present the findings from the study.

Section 3, includes a detailed description project that emerged based on the study findings and a review of literature to support the project. Next, in Section 4, I discussed the project's strengths, recommendations, limitations, scholarship, project development and evaluation, leadership and change, analysis of change, analysis of self as practitioner, analysis of self as project developer, the project's potential impact on social change, implications, applications, directions for future research, and conclusion.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of morale and address factors that influence low morale. Section 2 includes a discussion of the methodology used in this study to identify factors that affect low morale. The section is comprised of the following components: (a) research design and methodology, (b) the population and sampling, (c) protection of participants' rights (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) categories and themes, and (g) validity. High morale serves as a benefit, whereas, low morale can result in poor performance (Bowles & Cooper, 2009). To create a project that may improve morale at the school that was the focus of this study, I used a mixed-methods research design to identify variables affecting morale.

### **Research Design**

The research design that I selected for this study was a sequential, mixed-methods approach. A mixed-methods methodology allowed me to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions with integrated data (e.g., Creswell, 2013). The collection of data using diverse methods enhanced the validity of this study (e.g., Creswell, 2013). The qualitative data of one-on-one interviews provided detailed explanations of the phenomenon than the survey data alone (e.g., Ivankova, 2013). My intent in the qualitative portion of this study was to gather in-depth information concerning teacher morale at the school, by taking the individual experiences of participants into account. This study was guided by the following research questions:



1. What are teachers' perceptions of morale at the school that is the focus of this study?
2. What do teachers at the school that is the focus of this study perceive as factors that influence their morale?
3. What do teachers' at the school that is the focus of this study suggest is done to improve their morale?

Tashakkorie and Teddlie (2010) noted that qualitative methods in a mixed methods designs are used to search and understand the purpose of achievement or disappointment to demonstrate “evidence based practice or to identify strategies for facilitating implementation while quantitative methods are used to test and confirm” the problem and comprehend the predictors of successful implementation (pp. 29-33). The traditional mixed methods model offers advantages based on the ability to produce validated and substantiated findings (Creswell, 2009).

For this study, I chose a sequential transformative strategy. Terrell (2012) noted that a “sequential transformative strategy involves two distinct data collection phases and either can be collected first” (p. 254). Quantitative data from the self-administered survey was collected during the first phase of this study, followed by the collection of qualitative data through individual one-on-one interviews with participants. The survey was the first data sampling used to draw information and the second data sampling of one-on-one interviews was used to obtain information (Tashakkorie & Teddlie, 2010). The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and integrated using the questionnaire and interview samples (Creswell, 2009). Terrell (2012) noted a weakness of sequential

transformative strategy could be time consuming when moving from the first phase of data collection to the second (p. 254). The sequential transformative approach was appropriate for this study based on the strength of being straightforward in terms of reporting and implementation (Tashakkorie & Teddlie, 2010).

In this study, I considered a solely quantitative approach but rejected that idea. In quantitative research, objective theories are tested to examine the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2013). However, a quantitative study alone was not investigative enough to address the research questions, because I wanted a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from participants' personal perspectives (Creswell, 2013).

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research is commonly used in education to understand how people internalize their experiences. "Qualitative research explores and comprehends the attitudes or attributes of an individual toward a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2012, p. 4). The central basis for qualitative approach methods is for better understanding of research issues than either approach alone can provide (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Therefore, using qualitative methods alone would not have been appropriate because my goal was to gain meaningful insight regarding teachers' perception of morale at this school. A mixed-methods approach allowed me to gather quantitative data to learn teachers' perceptions of morale and to gather qualitative data to develop a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of morale (e.g., Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

**Quantitative.** At the school that was the focus of this study, an online survey was used to collect quantitative data to measure teacher morale. Creswell (2013) noted

that studying a population using “surveys provide a quantitative or numeric description of cultures, outlooks, or opinions of a population” (p.12). The instrument selected to obtain data was a survey developed by Thompson (2009) titled Teacher Morale and School Culture (see Appendix D). Permission to use Thompson’s (2009) survey was obtained on August 28, 2012 (see Appendix F). The purpose of the Thompson (2009) survey was to gain teachers’ perceptions of the impact of principal leadership on culture and morale. I focused on gathering data on teachers’ perceptions of morale at this school in order to answer the research questions. Therefore, using the survey allowed me to answer the research questions and obtain an understanding of how various factors impacted teacher morale for the quantitative part of this study.

**Qualitative.** Qualitative research permits researchers to gain a deeper understanding of a problem (Creswell, 2012). In addition, the purpose of gathering qualitative data was to develop an appreciation of specific factors that impact low teacher morale from the participants’ perspective and not from the perspective of the researcher (White, Polly, & Audette, 2012). The purpose of the interviews was to gather additional data and to take the individual experiences of participants into account. The individual interviews involved semistructured open-ended questions that were few in number and were developed to stimulate opinions and ideas from the participants (e.g., Creswell, 2013). Data from the interviews was gathered to gain further insight about the causes of low teacher morale. The interview protocol was semistructured, and the questions were generated based on the literature review (Appendix E). The goal of the interviews was to

provide participants with an opportunity to voice their opinions of low morale and identify factors that may contribute to morale at the school.

### **Quantitative Population and Sample**

In a research study, a decision about the number of participants should be one of the first steps of this systematic process (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). All licensed teachers at the school that was the focus of this study were invited to participate in this study. The research at this school was a public elementary school located in a Southern state in the United States. There were 25 licensed full-time teachers, one administrator, eight nonlicensed staff, and four support staff at the school. I employed convenience sampling to identify participants, which allowed me to select subjects because of specific convenience associated with answering research questions and proximity to the researcher (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The participants were selected based on the following: (a) employed at the school that is the focus of this study and (b) currently licensed as a teacher in Southern state. There were 25 licensed full-time teachers invited to participate in the study and 19 completed and returned the survey. The sample size is significant in the data-collection procedure (Creswell, 2012).

### **Qualitative Population and Sample**

Following completion of the survey, I selected the first 12 teachers who replied “I consent” to the invitation (see Appendix E) to participate in the interview. Because participants were in the quantitative portion of the study, the sampling frame for the qualitative portion of the study reflected the purposeful sampling used to select the survey participants. The sampling for the qualitative portion of the study was also self-

selecting to a degree based on the necessity of replying to the invitation for the interview (King & Horrocks, 2010).

I used semistructured interview questions for the qualitative portion of this study. Semistructured interviews involve the use of initial guiding questions (Flick, 2014). The phenomenon at the school that is the focus of this study was investigated to provide the maximum information for the sample size in qualitative research. Polkinghorne (1989) noted that 5 to 25 participants who have experienced the phenomenon should participate in the research. Based on this recommendation, I considered 12 participants an appropriate sample size for the qualitative phase of the study.

### **Protection of Participants**

The participants' rights of protection are important, and I exercised extreme care in protecting their rights during the data collection and analysis process. Informed Consent Forms were given to each participant (see Appendix C) and approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB; #07-25-14-0082462) and the school district of study (see Appendix C). The form was a written description of the research project presented for review by all participants and appropriate district office personnel. The consent document informed participants of the specific goals and objectives of the study and informed them that participation was voluntary. Each participant had an opportunity to review the background information and procedures for this study prior to signing consent to participate in the study.

Participants' names were not released during or at the conclusion of the study. Specifically, no participants' names are identified in any of the findings in the final

report. Participants were assigned a three-digit numeric code to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. During the study, the surveys and interviews were conducted at the participants' natural setting and did not interfere with the delivery of student instruction at any time or hinder the school's day-to-day activities. The data obtained from this study was securely stored on an encrypted flash drive at my home office in a safe and will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

Prior to commencing the quantitative data collection phase of this study, permission from the school that is the focus of this study (see Appendix B), the school district (see Appendix C), and approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (07-25-14-0082462) was secured. I individually e-mailed each participant inviting them to participate in the study and included a link to the electronic survey (see Appendix D). The invitation included an Informed Consent Agreement (see Appendix D) explaining the purpose of the study. Participants who agreed to participate replied, "I consent" and completed the survey (see Appendix E).

An advantage of using an online survey includes low cost and the opportunity for prompt responses (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative data were gathered through a self-administered survey to obtain teachers' perceptions of morale at the school; 19 of the 25 teachers partook in the survey. The survey results were coded and entered into SPSS 22.0 software for analysis. The survey data consisted of five demographic questions and 22 Likert-scaled questions to measure participants' perceptions of morale. Quantitative

data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and are displayed in tables in subsequent portions of this section.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data that I analyzed was based on survey results. Data from the survey were entered into version 21 of SPSS software. Nineteen participants answered the 22-item Likert-scaled survey questions regarding their perceptions of morale. Each participant was assigned a number to ensure anonymity. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22.0 for windows. The results of the quantitative data are reported in means, standard deviations, and range of scores to answer research questions for this study. “Descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the characteristics of the data, including frequencies and percentages for categorical data and means and standard deviations for continuous data” (Howell, 2010, p.3). The descriptive statistics for the survey questions describe teachers’ perceptions on morale at their school via Likert-scaled responses. There were inferential statistics were conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences existed with the perceptions of morale by different demographic groups.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Most of the participants in the study were female (84%) and Black or African American (84%). Six (32%) participants are resource staff teachers and nine (47%) participants held a master’s degree. Nine (47%) participants had between 6 to 15 years of teaching experience. Frequencies and percentages of participants’ demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Demographic	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Female	16	84
Male	3	16
Race		
American Indian	1	5
Black or African American	16	84
White	2	11
Position assigned to teach		
Pre-K	1	5
Kindergarten	2	11
First	2	11
Second	1	5
Third	2	11
Fourth	2	11
Fifth	3	16
Resource	6	32
Mississippi teaching license		
A Bachelor's degree	7	37
AA Master's degree	9	47
AAA Specialist degree	2	11
AAAA Doctorate degree	1	5
Years of teaching experience		
1 – 5 (early career)	8	42
6 – 15 (mid-career)	9	47
16 – 26 (late career)	2	11

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding error; *n* refers to the number of participants.



The survey allowed participants to respond with one of the following four response choices: (a) *strongly disagree*, (b) *disagree*, (c) *agree*, or (d) *strongly agree*. In examining the responses to the 22 Likert-scaled survey questions, I considered responses of agree or strongly agree as indicators of general assent with the given survey statement. Likewise, I considered responses of *strongly disagree* or *disagree* as indicators of dissent. Using this standard, all participants agreed that morale is important to school success, and all participants agreed that the administrative staff at their school is always visible and accessible.

Fifteen (79%) of the participants expressed their agreement that morale is low at the school. The survey asked each participant to respond to two separate statements, which alternatively described morale at the school as *low* and as *high*. Fifteen participants (79%) expressed agreement with the description of overall school morale as *low*. Conversely, six participants (32%) expressed agreement with characterizing school morale as *high*. Thirteen participants (68%) disagreed with the statement that the morale of most other teachers at the school was high. Eleven participants (58%) agreed with the statement that they are completely satisfied with their working conditions, though none expressed strong agreement. Eleven teachers (58%) disagreed with statement that they felt welcome to approach administrative staff for support. These descriptive statistics are presented in greater detail in Appendix L.

Each of the 22 Likert-scaled survey questions were coded as 1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*. Total perceptions of morale score was computed by taking the average of all 22 survey questions from the 19 participants. Scores ranged from 2.27 to

3.32, with a mean ( $M$ ) of 2.67 and standard deviation ( $SD$ ) of 0.25. The average total morale score was 2.67, thus indicating that participants generally had slightly more agreement than disagreement. Cronbach's alpha reliability test guided the total score to establish internal consistency of the computed scale made up of all 22-survey questions. The result of the analysis was a reliability coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) of .68, indicating questionable reliability (e.g., George & Mallery, 2010).

### **Inferential Analyses**

There were statistical analyses completed to determine if statistically significant differences existed on perceptions of morale total scores by the various demographic groups. The demographic variables proposed were gender, race, teaching position, degree earned, and teaching experience. However, because of sample size differences among the demographic groups the following was determined:

- gender was not analyzed due to the extreme sample size difference of 16 females vs. three males;
- race was not analyzed due to the extreme sample size difference of 16 African Americans vs. three other;
- teaching position was recoded to achieve approximately equal sample sizes of six Resource teachers vs. eight, second to fifth grade teachers vs. 5 Pre-K to first grade teachers;
- degree earned was recoded to achieve approximately equal sample sizes of nine master's degree holders vs. 10 other degree holders; and

- years teaching were recoded to achieve approximately equal sample sizes of eight participants with 1 to 5 years of experience vs. 11 participants with six to 15 years of experience.

Thus, statistical analyses were only conducted on perceptions of morale total scores by the following three demographic variables: teaching position (recoded), degree earned (recoded), and teaching experience (recoded).

For the analysis by teaching position (recoded), I conducted a variance (ANOVA) to determine if statistically significant differences existed on perceptions of morale total scores among the three positions: Resource vs. second to fifth grade vs. Pre-K to first grade. For the analyses by degree earned and years teaching, two independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to determine if statistically significant differences exist on perceptions of morale total scores between the two groups for each demographic: master's vs. other and 1 to 5 years of experience vs. 6 to 15 years of experience; one *t* test was conducted per dichotomous demographic variable. Statistical significance was determined using an alpha value of .05 for all three analyses.

The assumption of normality was assessed on perceptions of morale total scores using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test and the result was not statistically significant,  $p = .200$ ; thus, the assumption of normality was met. The first inferential analysis conducted was the ANOVA on perceptions of morale total scores by teaching position (Resource vs. second to fifth grade vs. Pre-K to first grade). The assumption of equal variances was assessed using Levene's Test and the result was not statistically significant,  $p = .222$ ; thus, the assumption of equality of variance was met. The results of the ANOVA

analysis were not statistically significant,  $F(2, 18) = 1.16, p = .338$ , suggesting that no statistical differences exist on perceptions of morale total scores by teaching position. No statistical significance can be interpreted on perceptions of morale total scores among Resource teachers, Pre-K to first grade teachers, and second to fifth grade teachers. The results of the ANOVA, along with the means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*ANOVA on Perceptions of Morale Scores by Teaching Position*

Variable	Pre-K – 1st grade <i>n</i> = 5		2nd – 5th grade <i>n</i> = 8		Resource <i>n</i> = 6		<i>F</i> (2, 18)	<i>P</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Perceptions of morale total scores	2.73	0.18	2.57	0.19	2.76	0.36	1.16	.338

The second inferential analysis conducted was an independent sample *t*-test on perceptions of morale total scores by degree earned (master's vs. other). The assumption of equal variances was assessed using Levene's Test and the result was not statistically significant,  $p = .474$ ; thus, the assumption of equality of variance was met. The results of the analysis were not statistically significant,  $t(17) = 0.77, p = .455$ , suggesting that no statistical differences exist on perceptions of morale total scores by degree earned. No statistical significance can be interpreted on perceptions of morale total scores between participants who earned a master's degree vs. participants who earned another degree type. The results of the *t*-test, along with the means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Independent Sample t test on Perceptions of Morale Scores by Degree Earned*

	Master's degree <i>n</i> = 9		Other degree <i>n</i> = 10		<i>t</i> (17)	<i>P</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Perceptions of morale total scores	2.71	0.29	2.62	0.21	0.77	.455

The final inferential analysis conducted was an independent sample *t*-test on perceptions of morale total scores by years teaching (1 to 5 vs. 6 to 15). The assumption of equal variances was assessed using Levene's Test and the result was not statistically significant,  $p = .073$ ; thus, the assumption of equality of variance was met. The results of the analysis were not statistically significant,  $t(17) = 0.08$ ,  $p = .938$ , suggesting that no statistical differences exist on perceptions of morale total scores by years teaching. No statistical significance can be interpreted on perceptions of morale total scores between participants who had 1 to 5 years teaching experience vs. participants who had 6 to 15 years teaching experience. The results of the *t*-test, along with the means and standard deviations, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Independent Sample t test on Perceptions of Morale Scores by Years of Teaching*

	1-5 years <i>n</i> = 8		6-15 years <i>n</i> = 11		<i>t</i> (17)	<i>P</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Perceptions of morale total scores	2.68	0.15	2.67	0.32	0.08	.938

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

In this study, I gathered qualitative data for this study through one-on-one semistructured interviews. All certified licensed teachers were invited to participate and the first 12 that completed the survey were scheduled for interviews. The following is a chronological list of steps I used to collect qualitative data: (a) I created a chart scheduling times to meet outside of instructional and student contact time, (b) ensured confidentiality by assigning participants a number (c) audio taped interviews, and (d) transcribed interviews.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Based on the research questions for this study, I conducted an analysis of the data and related the findings directly to the problem. Using a color-coding key, I noted themes that emerged from the data and those themes to answer the research questions for this study. Qualitative data were analyzed using codes and themes. According to Creswell (2012) the coding process helps the researcher to understand the data and to derive themes from the information gathered. The transcripts were colored coded to highlight similar topics to identify codes in data. The audio taped interviews of 12

participants were transcribed and examined for commonalities among responses.

Member checking is conducted by transcribing the interviews verbatim for accuracy, asking each participant to confirm or disconfirm (Creswell, 2012). In examining the interview data, the insights and experiences shared by participants formed four themes. I identified and summarized the findings for each research question by discussing the four themes; (a) low morale, (b) leadership, (c) support, and (d) motivation.

### **Theme 1: Low Morale**

This theme relates to the research question: What are teachers' perceptions of morale at the school that is the focus of this study? The teachers generally reported that low morale exists at the school. Of the 12 teachers interviewed, 11 described the morale at school as low. Participant 110 reported, "Teachers are talking about how unhappy they are and they are missing days from work." Participant 144 discussed her personal level of morale stating, "I don't like coming to work." Participant 122 explained, "It [low morale] determines how I feel at work." Similarly, Participant 155 stated, "The negative tone takes away from my focus to teach." Participant 120 cited low morale as a factor in determining the quality of the working environment saying, "In our school it's negative."

The teachers discussed several factors that contribute to low morale among staff. Four participants cited turnover among the teaching staff as a source of low morale. Participant 133 stated, "Too many teachers are leaving each year." Participant 110 echoed this point saying, "Too many have quit." Participant 177 also described this trend reporting that morale is low "because each year we start the year with more new staff." Participant 199 offered an explanation for the relationship between turnover and low

morale saying, “Because teachers resign each year and it feels like we are starting all over again.”

Another factor cited by the participants as a contributor to low morale is the pressure arising from heavy workloads and stringent performance standards. Participant 120 indicated that low morale has taken root “because the staff is on overload.” Participant 122 reported that there is “too much stress to perform well on tests.” Participant 111 explained, “The constant workload to increase student achievement makes me feel pressured to work miracles in a short period of time.” Participant 166 discussed the frustration teachers experience saying, “Teachers feel that we can’t do enough work to feel good about our jobs.”

A small minority of teachers expressed dissenting opinions concerning the quality and implications of the morale level at the school. Participant 188 expressed the perception of high morale among the school staff. In addition to characterizing morale among the staff as “high,” Participant 188 also reported feeling “confident” about the work accomplished in the school. Participant 110 acknowledged that low morale existed among staff members. However, Participant 110 rejected the notion that low morale played a role in employee performance stating, “Morale doesn’t affect the...job.”

## **Theme 2: Support**

This theme relates to the research question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of factors that influence morale?” The participants cited the lack of support and the need for it as impactful elements of the morale level among school staff. Nine of the 12 participants explicitly referenced the need for support. Both Participant 144 and



Participant 177 reported feeling that there was “no support” for teachers at the school.

Participant 133 argued that teachers “could get more positive support...when it comes to their workload.” Participant 199 suggested that school officials should support teachers

by “help[ing] teachers to grow in this teaching profession.” Participant 130 argued that the provision of greater support for teachers would “create a positive tone in the school.”

Participant 199 reinforced this point and emphasized the need to “support all staff positively.”

### **Theme 3: Motivation**

This theme relates to research question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of suggestions to improve morale?” The participants cited motivation as a factor that could contribute to the improvement of morale. Eight of the twelve participants specifically noted staff motivation as the primary means of improving morale. Participant 144 argued that a necessary action in improving morale would be to “motivate the staff to want to come to work.” Participant 144 offered a similar suggestion saying, “More efforts are needed to motivate staff.” Participant 120 maintained that an improvement in motivation among staff would help “to create a positive school culture.”

Participants also discussed positive reinforcement and feeling appreciated for their efforts as important facets of motivation. Participant 122 discussed the role of the leadership in improving motivation saying, “Leadership should provide positive feedback in a positive tone.” Similarly, Participant 144 listed “providing positive feedback” as an action that would improve morale. Participant 122 also argued that morale would be improved by “making teachers feel appreciated for all the work that they do.” Participant

188 offered more support for this idea saying that “teachers need to feel good about their work and appreciated for their work.”

#### **Theme 4: Leadership**

This theme relates to the research question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of suggestions to improve morale?” The leadership of the school emerged as a salient discussion point among the responses of the participants. The participants discussed the role of leadership in contributing to low morale. Additionally, the participants cited the responsibility of the school leadership to take actions to improve morale among school staff. The leadership was most often mentioned in the contexts of pressure, support, and staff motivation.

Some of the participants reported experiencing pressure concerning performance standards due to the high expectations of the school’s leadership. Participant 166 discussed this idea saying, “Leadership puts so much pressure on us to increase test scores.” Participant 144 substantiated this point by stating, “The principal only speaks about how to increase test scores.”

Several other participants discussed the leadership of the school in the context of supportiveness. Participant 144 reported, “There is no support from leadership.” Participant 177 also expressed a similar perspective. Participant 133 specifically called for “more positive support from leadership when it comes to their [teachers’] workload.” Participant 130 maintained that the provision of “more leadership support” would foster a more positive tone in the school.

Some participants discussed the leadership in the context of staff motivation. One participant argued that the school leadership is responsible for encouraging teacher efforts. Participant 122 stated, “Leadership should work to provide more positive reinforcement for the teachers.” Other participants pointed to the responsibility of the leadership in improving staff motivation to decrease turnover. Participant 199 argued, “Leadership has to find a way to retain teaching staff because this affects the veteran staff.”

### **Validity**

Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun noted (2011) “the validity determines how well an instrument measures what it is intending to measure” (p.28). The validity of the Teacher Morale and School Culture survey, developed by Thompson (2009), was established during Thompson’s pilot testing and original administration. Thompson used the survey to measure how teachers felt about morale, school culture, and administration. Content validity increases the trustworthiness of an assessment instruments (Newman, Lim, & Pineda, 2013). Only after years of experience with a survey instrument can the meaning and practical purpose of the instrument is determined (Northouse, 2012). Based on the survey responses of Thompson’s survey that represented the entire population, content validity has been established. “Validity is established through an in-depth review of the instrument, including an examination of the instrument’s items to be certain that they are accurately measuring the content being tested and by relating scores on the instrument to other measures” (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010, p.98).

This survey addresses the population and is appropriate to measure what the study wanted to know about morale, school culture, and administration. The current study established validity through the examination of Thompson's (2009) survey items that accurately addressed morale. Validity was ensured based on triangulated information gathered from the survey, interviews, and current literature. Participants were provided with a draft copy of the narrative. The participants reviewed the narrative draft and confirmed accuracy of findings.

### **Summary of Findings**

Several findings emerged from the analysis of the data. Quantitative responses generally perceived morale as between disagree and agree, with little extreme attitudes of strongly disagree or strongly agree. The average total morale score was 2.67, thus indicating that participants generally had slightly more agreement than disagreement. No participants strongly disagreed that morale was low at their school and 42% participants strongly disagreed that morale was high at their school. However, no participants strongly disagreed or strongly agreed that they were completely satisfied working in their conditions, and illustrated by the mean total morale score, more responses tended to agree (58%). Most teachers disagreed with feeling welcome to approach administrative staff for support.

The following four themes were identified from the responses of the interview participants: (a) low morale, (b) leadership, (c) support, and (d) motivation. The interview data indicated that the participants largely felt that the morale was low among the school's staff. The participants generally cited a perceived lack of leadership support

and the feeling of pressure related to heavy workloads and high performance standards. Participants collectively cited the need to increase staff motivation as a remedy to low morale. The majority of participants pointed to the leadership as a crucial factor in both the creation and the elimination of low morale among the staff. The responses of two participants effectively summarize the general consensus of the interview participants. Participant 120 explained, “The staff is on overload and don’t feel that the principal provides support.” As Participant 188 argued, “Give teachers support and motivate [them] and morale will be positive.” The triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings supports each other in that teachers generally do not have high morale and are not motivated by administration. Stronger participative leadership is needed to support and improve morale.

### **Conclusion**

In this this mixed method study, I addressed teacher morale, factors that influence morale, and teachers’ perceptions to improve morale. The problem, as presented for the research project, indicated morale is low. Through the investigative process, I identified the needs and concerns from the participants. Consequently, teachers have not been motivated. In order to ensure success at the school that is the focus of this study, teacher input was carefully evaluated in the plan for professional development. The results have been integrated into 3 days of professional development trainings, resulting in a plan to adopt participative leadership for the principal and teachers.

Following are Sections 3 and 4. In Section 3 of the study, I will discuss the project in detail. This section will also include a literature review, a project evaluation

plan, and a discussion on the project goals and implications. Section 4 is the final section of the doctoral study, discussing my reflections of the research process and project, and conclusions concerning the study.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The goal of this mixed method project study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of morale and address factors that influence low morale. Based on the findings, teachers at the school that is the focus of this study indicated that morale was low. Educators are challenged with creating a positive learning environment while experiencing low morale in their profession (Farmer, 2011). In this project study, I identified support, leadership, and motivation as teachers' perceptions of factors that influence their morale. These factors have been categorized into three major themes in the evidence of literature: (a) leading change, (b) participative leadership, and (c) teacher leadership. The three themes formed the basis for the project to improve morale and increase teacher retention. Miao (2012) noted that the role morale and motivation play in employee retention and suggested that effective leadership can help reduce employee turnover within an organization.

#### **Description and Goals**

The State Department of Education Commission on School Accreditation approved the adoption of the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning on April 18, 2012, as the state standards for professional development (State Department of Education, 2012). "Standards for professional learning are: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes" (Forward, Killion, & Crow, 2011, p.5). In response to the adoption of the Learning Forward Standards for professional learning by the State Department of Education, I developed a

proposed professional development training for the purpose of leading change to improve morale and increase the teacher retention rate using the learning forward standards to guide the design for implementation and evaluation of professional learning.

Professional development (PD) is described as another engagement of teacher learning related to the work of development and improvement process (Desimone, 2011). In the past decade, a broad-based definition of professional development has emerged. Desimone (2011) defined PD as interactive and social, and comprised of an array of interrelated learning opportunities. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2011) defined PD as a “collaborative lifelong approach to learning that nourishes growth” (p. 469). The focus of my PD training was to present the principal and teachers with a presentation of this study’s findings. I used these three themes to design the modules for PD training: (a) leading change, (b) participative leadership, and (c) teacher leadership. PD training encourages ongoing growth and development (Zoul & Whitaker, 2013). Therefore, PD was selected as an appropriate genre to assist the school that is the focus of this study in responding to the problem of low morale. The PD sessions might impact change by improving morale and increase the teacher retention rate at the school.

Leadership has been identified as both a cause and contributing factor to low morale and at the school participative leadership may be a solution to improve morale (Whitaker et al., 2013). Positive morale seems to begin with effective leadership. Leaders undermine teachers when they do not show support of teacher collaboration by providing teachers with the necessary time and support components to collaborate (McClure, 2008). McClure (2008) stated that an effective collaboration effort requires



proper leadership support and access to training. This project will involve PD presentations and trainings by the district's Chief Academic Officer in the Elementary Education Division for the teachers at the school with the following outcomes:

- Develop an awareness of low teacher morale,
- Understand the contributing factors of low teacher morale,
- Develop an understanding of how to lead change,
- Identify the role of teacher leaders and the role of the principal in participative leadership, and
- Successfully implement and adapt participative leadership.

### **Rationale**

Based on the themes that emerged from the findings of this study, previous reports from this school, and the literature in general, there was a need to address how the principal can lead change. Kotter (2012) suggested forming a powerful guiding coalition as a step to leading change. This change could lead and motivate the principal and teachers to work together as a team to implement and adapt participative leadership. Principal leadership plays a significant role in teachers' motivation (Eyal & Roth, 2011). However, according to Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010), principals struggle in leading change and in identifying and developing best practices to lead teachers. Therefore participative leadership has been identified as an appropriate model to enhance teacher morale (Sheppard, Hurley, & Dibbon 2010). Bagarette (2014) noted that "participative leadership leads to delegation and communication about goals, processes of goal accomplishment, respect for diversity in team members, and a collective effort to

seek quality in each task and final product” (p. 395). Sheppard, Hurley, and Dibbon (2010) noted that leadership might impact teacher morale and enthusiasm. As noted by Voon, Lo, Ngui, and Ayob (2011), effective leaders influence employee job satisfaction. Effective leaders understand the critical link between leadership and professional learning for educators (Learning Forward, 2011).

### **Review of the Literature**

The literature that I have selected and review here is relevant to the topic of leadership and leading change. These topics were selected because they were identified in the study as causes of low morale at the school that is the focus of this study. The following databases were used: Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest Central, SAGE, EBSCO and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. The following keywords used for the search include: *collaboration, job satisfaction, leadership, morale, motivation, and support*. These terms allowed me to examine pertinent, current research methodologies used pertaining to supportive leadership to improve morale and develop PD training to motivate teachers and the school leader. Leading change is the conceptual framework that I used to guide development of this project. This professional development training is the appropriate genre to address the problem of low morale. The literature review is presented in the following order: conceptual framework, participative leadership, implementation of participative leadership, and leading change.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this professional development project is derived from leadership and leading change. Chemers (2014) described leadership as a “process

of social influence in which one person can enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common goal” (p. 74). Northouse (2012) identified the following “leadership components for leading change; (a) leadership in practice, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs in groups, and (d) leadership involves common goals” (p.5). These components might influence the process of leading change.

According to Kotter (2012), a good leaders realizes the need for change. Kotter (2014) identified “eight steps leaders must take to transform a school or organization: (a) establish a sense of urgency, (b) form a powerful guiding coalition, (c) create a vision, (d) communicate the vision, (e) empower others to act on the vision, (f) plan for and create short-term wins, (g) consolidate improvements and produce more change, and (h) institutionalize new approaches” (p.1). Leaders with a vision can improve change process (Kotter, 2014). It is important for leadership to be the driver of change” (Kotter, 2012, p. 1).

Voon et al. (2011) noted that a capable leader provides direction for leading change in an organization and achieving desired goals. Positive leaders support and promote job satisfaction in organizations (Voon et al., 2011). “An effective leader must appeal to the self-interest of followers and use a combination of rewards that are short-term and long-term to lead change in an organization” (Voon et al., 2011, p. 24). Leadership styles are important when managing an organization. Leaders can affect job satisfaction, commitment, and productivity by adopting an appropriate leadership style (Voon et al., 2011).

Participative leadership style is appropriate to adapt and influence change in leadership and improve morale (Whitaker et al., 2013). Building staff morale is linked to participative leadership in terms of motivating and inspiring teachers, increasing teacher retention, and reducing teacher absenteeism. Based on the study's findings, teachers identified leadership as a need to improve morale. Therefore, leadership will play an important role in leading change through participative leadership at the school that is the focus of this study.

At the school, participants will engage in PD trainings implementing participative leadership. Participative leadership is the leadership style of the principal that encourages teachers to work together (Somech, 2010). There might be a positive outcome when the principal and teachers make decisions together to promote school effectiveness. Based on Somech's (2010) findings, participative leadership focuses on school outcomes (productivity and innovation) and teacher outcome (job satisfaction). Participative leadership may serve as a leadership style to improve morale.

### **Participative Leadership**

Leadership emerged as a common theme from the data collection and analysis of surveys and one-on-one interviews; therefore, the development of participative leadership was necessary to address how the principal can lead change at the school that is the focus of this study. According to Cherry (2010), participative leadership style allows other to have a voice. Cherry (2010) noted that participative "leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel supported and committed to the decision-making process" (p.1). Based on data analysis and the review

of literature, I selected PD training for the principal and teachers, to address the problem of low morale at the school.

Bell and Mjoli (2014) noted that participative leadership style impact morale and team outcomes. Therefore, participative leadership is described as a joint process of the principal and teachers making joint decisions (Bell & Mjoli, 2014). Bell and Mjoli (2014) noted that participative leadership “is not relatively a new concept because it has a rich and varied history” (p. 51). Participative leadership behavior leads to increased work outcomes by inducing intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment” (Bell & Mjoli, p. 453). This behavior influence enables the principal and teachers to develop relationships based on trust (2014). According to Bell and Mjoli (2014), participative leadership motivates commitment to the organization.

Building trust between the principal and teachers through participative school leadership is supported by the theory of a democratic school leadership (Huang, Lun, Liu, & Gong, 2010). Early leadership theory, tracing its roots from Dewey (1916), is primarily concerned with cultivating an environment that supports participation and sharing of ideas (Bolden, 2011, p. 251). The participative leader works to improve the morale of teachers, school environment, and educational stakeholders as a shared influence in decision making between the leaders and his or her employees Somech (2010).

Teamwork is “an important condition that vitalizes the participatory perspective of the leadership process” (Costa & Agnol, 2011, p.1306). One quality of the participative leader is the ability to foster team innovation (Rosing & Frese, 2011).

Fostering teamwork advances the workplace by inducing empowerment and trust (Huang et al., 2010). Participative leadership impacts team leadership and team effectiveness by allowing the team leader and team members to collectively lead one another (Sauer, 2011). Based on Sauer's (2011) findings, team performance is better with participative leadership when leaders work with team members.

According to Somech (2010), team reflection is important in participative leadership. Participative leadership works because of the specific decision-making process, encouraging creativity and participation (Blanchard, 2013). Reiter, deVreede, and deVreede (2013) noted that participative leadership promotes knowledge sharing through the process of team reflection. Pienaar and Raymond (2013) noted that participative leadership focuses on best practices regarding team decision-making.

### **Implementing Participative Leadership**

Participative leadership can improve work performance through a motivational process of empowerment and trust (Huang et al., 2010). Based on Sorenson and Holman (2014) findings, participative leadership improved employee wellbeing in knowledge and work conditions. Schools can use numerous methods to develop participative leaders. Somech (2010) noted that elements of motivations is a primary predictor of organizational and employee outcomes.

The implementation of PD is essential; therefore; trainings will focus on staff engagement through participative leadership by involving the principal and teachers in the decision-making process in the school (Whitaker et al., 2013). Whitaker et al., (2013) suggested encouraging participative leadership in an effort to have a more uniform

decision making process with the principal and teachers. This uniform decision-making creates a supportive environment and influence team outcomes (Hoyle, 2012).

Whitaker et al., (2013) presented the five management strategies for implementing participative leadership that was used by the Duluth Public Schools:

(a) encourages participation and creativity among staff, (b) builds commitment to shared goals, (c) structured employee involvement so that employees are routinely involved in decisions that affect them, (d) sets a high priority on advocating for ideas generated by subordinates, and (e) develops a strong sense of trust and collegiality among all staff members in the pursuit of the goal of excellence.

(p.59)

These strategies focused on teaching and emphasizing the principles of participative leadership. As the professional requirements of educators increase there are higher accountability demands and expectations placed on school leaders to implement and collaborate with other educators to make school decisions. Furthermore, it is important for the principal to model the strategies.

Participative leadership may lead to higher levels of teacher commitment in the field of education (Miao, Newman, & Schwartz, 2013). A commitment by the principal and teachers to use participative leadership is essential for staff retention (Grissom, 2012). Whitaker et al., (2013) discussed administrative support as an essential element in promoting and developing participative leadership. Support needs to be demonstrated by (a) trust in people and participative leadership (b) a belief that would lend itself to a willingness to be open to suggestions and to listen, (c) identify a need for improvement in

the decision-making process, and (d) providing attention and time to the program (Whitaker et al., 2013, p. 59).

Based on the findings of Grissom (2012), the effective principal can be linked to participative leadership, teacher outcomes, and job satisfaction. Teacher turnover is less likely under effective principal leadership (Grissom, 2012). Grissom (2012) noted that under ineffective principal leadership turnover increases as teachers' perceived influence decreases. Participative decision making is essential in promoting shared decision making and job satisfaction (Richard, Kirby, & Chadwick, 2013).

Participative leadership varies from school to school. Fullan (2014) suggested adapting teacher leadership for leading change and school improvement. The principal's leadership style is a key element in the effectiveness of teacher participation (Eyal & Roth, 2011). Eyal and Roth (2011) noted that administrators in education have delegated more leadership responsibilities to principals. The principals should be trained to facilitate autonomous motivation. Principals should be "trained to be supportive toward their educational staff, and this may potentially facilitate teachers' autonomous motivation, satisfaction, and well-being" (Eyal & Roth, 2011, p. 265).

According to Grissom (2012), teacher participation matters in school decision-making. Teachers have indicated that a greater decision-making role for teachers in school policies and practices is essential (Behrstock & Rizzolo, 2014). Behrstock and Rizzolo (2014) noted that school and district leaders who encourage teacher participation could boost teacher morale and improve teacher retention. Therefore, the principal remains the central source of leading change to support and motivate teachers.



## **Leading Change and Teacher Leadership**

Leading change is important for organizations (Kotter, 2012). School principals play a significant role in leading change (Garrison-Wade & Gonzales, 2013). According to DuFour and Mattos (2013), incentives and professional development should be encouraged by principals for teachers (p.34). Leadership is essential to promote success in an organization (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013).

The change process cannot be successful without effective leadership (Fullan, 2014). Fullan (2014) shared suggested changes that might be successful when (a) principals and teachers are mobilized by caring and respect, (b) talented staff is working together, and (c) expertise is developed and shared (p. 74). The suggested solutions might increase teacher leadership roles. Teacher leadership teams include grade-level teachers, resource teachers, and advisory council members (Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Skilled principals know that capitalizing on teachers' leadership strengths is smart leadership (Stronge, 2013).

Teacher leadership is teachers with special talents, knowledge, and skills (Cody, 2013). Teachers have the ability to demonstrate their talents and knowledge through teacher leadership. Gerger (2009) noted that teachers lead by teaching well. Teachers in leadership roles embrace the tensions of being in a relationship with students, colleagues, parents and the community (Gerger, 2009). Collaborating and taking on new roles and responsibilities can improve teacher morale (Behrstock & Rizzolo, 2014).

According to Sherratt and Rizzolo (2014) administrators have hesitated to initiate teacher participation. The authors suggested guidelines for teacher leaders' participation;

(a) set expectations up front, (b) create time for authentic engagement, (c) encourage participation, and (d) support teacher leaders (Sherratt & Rizzolo, 2014). While administrators have hesitated to initiate participation, Sherratt and Rizzolo (2014) noted that when the decision-making process includes teachers, the culture of the school changes.

Finding teacher leaders is a crucial step in motivating teachers. Motivating teachers is essential for school success as it is intended to lead the core work of the organization (Spillane, 2012). It is important that principals learn the gifts and talents of every teacher. With this knowledge, teachers are assigned to work in their area of expertise (Whitaker et al., 2013). These teacher leaders will serve as in-house experts at schools for other teachers to go to and learn teaching techniques to improve teaching and learning. Whitaker et al. (2013) noted that teacher leadership is essential to having a great school.

Fullan (2014) identified six strategies for change a principal should adopt to promote the success of their school; (a) respect and nurture their employees with fair treatment and motivation, (b) connect peers with purpose by creating collaboration time, (c) build capacity through teacher leadership, (d) provide professional development for continual learning, (e) be transparent and open to measurements that focus on selected outcomes, and (f) develop teacher leaders in the school/district work to enhance continuity and to sustain performance (p.1). Whitaker et al., (2010) noted a key aspect to motivating teachers is that “in effective schools, teachers and principals share the same

perspectives of how much input teachers have in decision-making within their schools” (p.22).

Although principals impact teacher motivation, a teacher shares the responsibility of self-motivation. According to Richardson, Karabenick, and Watt (2014), self-efficacy is individuals’ beliefs in their ability to successfully perform a task. In a school’s setting the self-efficacy beliefs of teachers with greater instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement experienced greater job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). A teacher’s efficacy is his or her belief to bring about desired outcomes in learning (Lumpe, Vaughn, Henrikson, & Bishop, 2014). Teachers’ self-efficacy can be used in understanding the motivational beliefs that drive teacher engagement and effectiveness is more important than ever before (Klassen, Durksen, & Tze, 2014). Furthermore, teachers’ self-efficacy impacts their motivation to teach (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

According to Richardson, Karabenick, and Watt (2011) motivation is an important factor that influences teachers’ professional behavior. Teachers that are motivated assist in sustaining healthy, committed, and effective teachers (Richardson, et al., 2014). Educational leaders that show concern about the feelings of staff and motivate staff become trustworthy leaders (Welch, 2014). Whitaker et al., (2009) noted that principal’s struggle each day to earn trust from teachers. In addition, Whitaker et al., (2013) asserted that when effective teachers trust their leaders this builds staff morale. The authors’ perspective is that teacher leadership is important to the change and improvement process in order to improve morale and motivate teachers.

Transforming teachers' beliefs and skills takes time and patience (Whitaker et al., 2010). To create an environment of participative leadership, the principal must develop staff. According to Fullan (2014), leading change is the most important and difficult leadership challenge. Leadership promotes the required actions to regulate behavior, and "only leadership can get change to stick by anchoring it in the very culture of an organization" (Kotter, 2012, p. 449).

According to Bryman (2013) participative leaders have happier and more productive staff because people prefer to have a voice in decision-making. Participative leadership would emerge with an increase of teacher participation, distribution in decision-making, and involvement in the staff development process. Findings by Hulpia, Devos, and Van Keer (2011) noted that teachers' commitment is related to an effective and supportive leader and participative decision-making involving the leadership team. These findings indicate the need for principals to promote participative leadership to motivate teachers.

### **Summary**

In the findings of this mixed method study, I identified the need to address leadership as a factor affecting morale at the school that is the focus of this study. Four categories emerged during the data analysis: low morale, leadership, support, and motivation. These categories helped frame the literature review and were used to design the modules for the PD trainings of the project study to improve morale at the school. The PD project is derived from the theory of participative leadership and leading change. Herzberg's theory of leadership is important for educational leaders (2003). The need to

sustain relationships, gain trust from staff, allow staff autonomy, and provide staff acknowledgements are essential needs that school leaders have control over (Herzberg, 2003, p.19). Building and maintaining positive relationships is the most important charge of leaders within an organization (p.19). Kotter's (2014) eight steps are essential to lead change and transition in schools.

Based on the study's findings, teachers indicated that leadership is a contributing factor to low morale. According to Strasser (2014), high morale is the end result of being treated well by leaders. Therefore, "morale is not a function of practices designed to maintain or create morale" (Strasser, p.10). When teachers are empowered to make decisions about their profession morale can improve (Strasser, 2014, p.10). The implications of the findings are important in order to promote participative leadership and to improve morale at the school that is the focus of this study. Participative leadership will give teachers responsibility to become influencers and decision-makers. McCann (2011) noted that to create a participative leadership style the principal must start by leading change and become a staff developer at the school.

The review of literature indicates that leadership practices are instrumental in motivating teachers. Participative leadership is needed to address the low morale and to retain teachers at the school that is the focus of this study. It is expected that participative leadership will assist the principal in leading change and in building collaborative relationships with the teachers.

There are numerous leadership styles that the school might adopt. Participative leadership might be the most successful leadership style at the school that is the focus of

this study. In particular, participative leadership can be implemented through modeling the following participative leadership behaviors: (a) putting followers first by cultivating teacher leadership teams, (b) providing the interpersonal collaboration that affects morale, and (c) incorporating teacher skills and ideas into the decision-making process.

Principals play an essential role in empowering teachers to improve their practice while creating a shared sense of decision-making (Gutmann & Oertwig, 2013). Gutmann and Oertwig (2013) noted that the role of the leaders is important to create support structures for change. Leadership skills and abilities are critically important to positively increase staff morale for successful school change. According to Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa (2013) a commitment by the principal to use participative leadership is essential for teacher input and participation to be effective. Participative leadership could assist the school adapt to a leadership style that promotes joint decision making.

## **The Professional Development Project**

### **Implementation of the Project**

Three primary purposes of PD are described by Cafarella and Daffron (2013) as; (a) promoting individual growth and development, (b) providing responses to practical problems and issues of adult life, and (c) creating work opportunities to examine and foster community and societal change. Fullan (2014) noted the purpose of professional development is to build long-term capacity for change in work cultures.

A PD project was developed based on the themes that emerged from this study and the need to address how the principal can lead change at the school. There will be three one-day PD sessions; one during the winter break, one day after the spring break,

and one day at the end of the school year at the school. This will provide participants the opportunity to observe the school that is the focus of this study and reflect between sessions on morale and leadership development. In this sense, reflective practices will provide educators the opportunity reflect upon questions about function, roles, and performance away from the daily work routine (Tarrant, 2013).

On day one of the PD training, the findings of this study will be presented with a focus on Module 1 that is Leading Change. The session will include a team building activity and provide opportunities for reflection. This opportunity will afford “for team members to share their background and demographics in short activities during the professional development in the hope of building valuable work relationships and a new understanding and appreciation for each other” (Crippen, 2012, p.192).

On day two of the PD training, Module 2 on Participative Leadership will be presented with a discussion of reflections on Module 1. The participative leadership presentation will provide participants an opportunity to share information and “develop greater understanding and appreciation for each other as leaders and followers to reinforce an atmosphere of transparency, trust and authenticity” (Crippen, 2012, p. 195).

Day three will consist of Module 3 on Teacher Leadership. The PD training will begin with a discussion of reflections on Module 1 and 2 and a PowerPoint presentation on teacher leadership. The overview of teachers’ roles in leadership will be presented in the PowerPoint presentation with a scholarly definition of teacher leadership. Participants will answer discussion questions. The participants will be divided into groups based on grade level to discuss and present responses to group activities. This

session will end with a review of all 3 modules and participants will complete evaluations.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

Each PD session will be conducted at the school that is the focus of this study in the designated training room. The CAO (Chief Academic Officer) for the school district will facilitate the training. I will provide all of the necessary resources required and prepare the training room for the PD sessions. The training room is currently equipped with computers with Internet access, a Smart board projector and adequate seating conducive for learning. These are the following items that will be used for the trainings

Power Point presentations;

1. Participant worksheets to accompany videos and PowerPoint presentations;
2. Scholarly research articles on participative leadership and teacher leadership;
3. Stationery: pens, markers, sticky notes, large flip chart, highlighters; and
4. Formative and summative evaluations.

### **Potential Barriers**

One potential barrier for the PD might be that the school has been cited as a failing school and has been assigned to complete an improvement plan for the district. The principal and teachers are currently attending workshops with the district and state department to improve student achievement. The scheduling is important for the principal and teachers to have input in the times of their PD training. Working with the principal to schedule an appropriate time for the PD session might control this barrier.



In addition, the CAO is the principal's supervisor. The principal might be uncomfortable with the CAO conducting the PD training; therefore this might be a potential barrier. However, the CAO has conducted numerous district PD trainings for principals and teachers. In this case, change is needed to move the school that is the focus of this study from a failing school to a successful school. The CAO's goal is to conduct PD sessions for the principal and teachers that will strengthen and refine their day-to-day performance.

Another potential barrier for the PD might be for the school that is the focus of this study to change and adapt to participative leadership. The principal and teachers might be hesitant to change. This will require the principal and teachers to establish a new leadership style. Fullan (2014) noted "leading in a culture of change means creating a culture of change" (p.44). Change at the school could improve morale.

### **Implementation and Evaluation Timeline**

Table 5 provides an overview of the professional development project and the evaluation plan.

Table 5

*Implementation and Evaluation Plan Timeline*

Day	Sessions	Objective
1	Leading Change	Implement professional development and formative evaluation (Appendix A).
2	Participative Leadership	Implement professional development and formative evaluation (Appendix A).
3	Teacher Leadership	Complete PD summative evaluation (Appendix A).

PD sessions will be held on designated professional development days when students are not present. I will maintain communication with the principal via e-mail on a bi-weekly basis. This communication will provide support for the principal to continue on the path of implementing, adapting, and practicing the strategies of participative leadership. The information will provide me with changes taking place at the school that is the focus of this study and to continue evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of participative leadership to improve morale.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

My role and responsibilities as a presenter will be to ensure that the times and dates are set and confirmed and all participants are aware of the schedule. This will be accomplished via phone with follow-up emails. A reminder e-mail will be sent to each participant a week prior to the PD session. I will ensure that all presentation resources, equipment, and stationery are available the day before with a visit to the training location

for a preliminary trial. The role and responsibilities of the CAO as presenter will be to present the principal and teachers the three modules on morale and leadership, participative leadership, and teacher leadership. The principal and teachers will view videos and PowerPoint presentations and engage in various activities and exercises.

I will consult with the principal at the school to confirm the attendance of teachers and the principal. The principal and the teachers are required to attend all sessions and their attendance and completion all assignments will help determine the success of the PD training. The PD training sessions will be credited toward the teachers' annual training requirements and recorded in the school's training portfolio.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The PD sessions will occur during designated professional development days on the school district's calendar. A formative evaluation (Appendix A) will be used after each PD training session. Caffarella and Daffron (2013) defined program evaluation as "a process used to define whether the design and delivery of a program were effective and whether the proposed outcomes were met" (p. 233). According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013), "evaluation is a continuous process that begins in the preliminary planning phase and continues throughout the program" (p.233). Evaluation plans include formative evaluations for each PD training session and a summative evaluation for the entire project.

### **Formative Evaluation**

Formative evaluation provides the presenter with valuable feedback that can be used to make any necessary changes to meet the needs of participants. The formative

evaluation is needed to provide the presenter with what is working and what is not working during PD training (Zepeda, 2011). A formative evaluation will be completed using a questionnaire at the end of each PD training session. Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire indicating their response to such items instructors, content, resources, and will provide the opportunity for additional comments (Appendix A).

### **Summative Evaluation**

The project goals and objectives will form the foundation for the evaluation. The summative evaluation (Appendix A) will be conducted to determine if the stated goals and objectives were addressed. According to Caffarella and Daffron (2013) this evaluation process may address changes in participants, in the procedures and practices at the school, in the community. The overall goals of the project are to improve morale and increase teacher retention at the school by adapting participative leadership.

On the final day of the PD training, participants will complete the summative evaluation. The summative evaluation will be distributed at the end of the final PD training session. All participants will be asked to complete the evaluation. The evaluation will be anonymous and a collection box will be placed in the training room exit area for submission.

The summative evaluation will provide base line data to be used as a comparison for the study's findings to measure if morale has improved at the school since the implementation of the participative leadership principles. The formative and summative evaluations will be analyzed and compared by the principal and me. Analysis will involve the calculation of mean scores for both pre and post data. Mean scores will then

be compared. Changes in mean scores convey if participants' morale has increased or decreased since the implementation of participative leadership principles. I will provide a summary of the formative and summative results via e-mail correspondence to the site for dissemination.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

Costa and Agnol (2010) described the participative process between workers and the leader of a group as the mutual influence of the subjects among themselves and directed towards common defined purposes. From this perspective, it's essential to develop participative leadership that considers vision and motivation, resulting from responsibility, which is fundamental to the exercise of leadership (Costa & Agnol, 2010). Therefore, long-term outcomes of this style of leadership include positive social change.

Through the development and implementation of participative leadership at the school that is the focus of this study the implications for social change is an improvement in morale for teachers and an increase in teacher retention. Additionally, improving the school's climate within the classroom and community where students, teachers and parents feel safe and respected might change morale. The implementation of participative leadership provides administrators and teachers instructional time to collaborate, motivate one another by sharing professional practices, and self-motivate. This collaboration might result in academic success for the school.

**Far-Reaching**

It is important to improve morale at the school to increase teacher retention associated with teacher motivation, absenteeism, and to improve student achievement. Solving the problem of morale benefits all stakeholders; faculty and staff, parents, student, and the school district. This study has the potential to provide far-reaching implications that influence educators globally.

According to the principal, the school that is the focus of this study has experienced a low teacher retention rate for the past three years. The findings of this study and the outcomes of the PD training project could assist in leading change by adapting to participative leadership and improving morale at the school that is the focus of this study and district, to benefit all stakeholders. The PD project focused on leading change by adapting a leadership style that motivates change at the school. This leadership style change could affect morale by promoting shared decision making while increasing teacher leadership roles at the school.

**Conclusion**

The four major themes that emerged during data analysis for this study were: low morale, leadership, support, and motivation. These themes formed the basis for the project study to improve morale and increase teacher retention at the school that is the focus of this study. A PD training consisting of three sessions was developed. The PD project is derived from the conceptual framework of leadership and leading change. The conceptual framework of leadership and leading change guided the design of three modules for the PD sessions.

The development of the PD trainings focused on four themes that emerged from data analysis of this study and were used to design the modules. I will present the findings of the study. The CAO and I will present the three modules of morale and leadership, participative leadership, and teacher leadership. These three modules are designed to engage the principal and teachers in activities and exercises focused on leadership and leading change. The purpose of this PD project was to address how the principal can lead change for the school to adapt a leadership style to improve morale.

I will conduct a summative evaluation using a questionnaire at the end of the professional development trainings (see Appendix K). This evaluation provides answers to questions based on accountability of the PD presentations. The principal and teachers will be asked to complete the questionnaire indicating their reactions on such items as content, instructors, and instructional techniques and they will have the opportunity to provide additional comments. The summative evaluation focuses on the outcome of the PD training.

This evaluation outcome might provide useful data for teacher motivation. The educational system plays an important role in teacher motivation. Although, teacher motivation is difficult to identify (Boyle, 2014), teacher motivation is essential. Teacher motivation is important to retain teachers (Rones, 2011). This study and the accompanying professional development project may lead to positive social change at the school that is the focus of this study by improving morale and increasing teacher retention.

The next section includes reflections, drawn conclusions on the strengths of the project, and offer recommendations for remediation of limitations. This is comprised of a discussion on scholarship. The reflections include my journey as a researcher, project developer, and scholar. Section 4 also includes a discussion on directions for future research.



## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This section will provide (a) reflections and draw conclusions about the strengths of the project and (b) recommendations for remediation of its limitations with a discussion on scholarship. Reflections will encompass (a) my journey as a researcher, (b) project development and evaluation, and (c) leadership and motivation. There are self-analyses of me as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer included. Finally, the potential impact of the project on social change will be discussed along with suggestions about implications, applications and direction for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

The goal of this project was to provide the principal and teachers with strategies to implement participative leadership in an effort to improve teacher morale at the school that is the focus of this study. Teacher participants will have an opportunity to participate in 3-day Professional Development (PD) training. This PD training project is expected to provide numerous strengths in addressing the problem of low morale identified at the school. The 3-day training involves sessions on leading change, participative leadership, and teacher leadership. These sessions were developed based on teachers' perceptions of factors that influence their morale: (a) support, (b) leadership, and (c) motivation.

Participation in this PD training might lead to the principal and teachers adapting participative leadership. This project emphasizes the importance of leadership and the impact a leader has on an organization. The project is expected to develop a collaborative relationship between the principal and the teachers. Finally, the project

presents opportunities for self-reflection and self-improvement via the development of participative leadership principles.

Through the development of participative leadership morale might improve. The project's ultimate long-term goal is to improve morale through leadership development at the school that is the focus of this study to increase teacher retention. Achieving this goal benefits all stakeholders. The project has the potential to create positive social change at the school and the district.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this study was my use of convenience sampling. The sample that I used for this study was not snowball, therefore inferences could not be made for the greater population and conclusions could only be applied to this sample. To remediate this limitation, future research could change the sampling method to snowball sampling so the results could be generalized to the greater population. Snowball sampling might reach certified teachers that no longer work at the school that is the focus of this study.

There were other limitations in addressing the problem for this project. One of the greatest limitations was teacher retention, itself. Teachers who are unsatisfied leave the school, and the district, each year. Teachers would like the option to transfer each year. Currently, teachers may apply for an in-district transfer to another school site in the district after the completion of 3 or more years. Another limitation is the length of the professional development project. Three days could be considered insufficient for the transfer of learning for all participants.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

An alternative approach for addressing the problem of low morale at the school that was the focus of this study differently from professional development training could be for the principal to implement one-on-one teacher time to meet individually with teachers periodically throughout the year. This would provide teachers the opportunity to meet with the principal and share issues and concerns. This may require the principal dedicating more time to teachers. In addition, teacher time could support and motivate teachers to build relationships.

There are other alternatives for addressing low morale at the school that was the focus of this study that include: team building workshops, implementing staff recognition programs, and peer-evaluation to promote teacher leadership and teacher learning. Team building workshops could assist the staff developing relationships and trust with one another. Peer-evaluation serves a source of mentoring for teachers. Teachers have an opportunity to develop while being evaluated by their peer. These suggested alternatives might support the long-term goal promote positive morale.

### **Scholarship**

The doctoral journey has transformed my learning abilities as an educator. This experience taught me endurance. Participating in the academic learning process advanced my knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct research and write scholarly. Many Walden staff members have provided me with support needed to achieve academic excellence. The Walden library assisted me on several occasions to locate research articles pertaining to my study. I used the editors in the Walden Writing Center to edit

my proposal for content, grammar, and APA style usage. The academic advisors have always responded with helpful assistance, resources, and encouragement to succeed in my studies. My committee chairperson and co-chairperson have shared their wisdom, leadership, and guidance throughout my studies.

When attending a Walden residency in 2013, I gained a learning perspective of Walden's expectations to move forward. While at this residency, I was encouraged by instructors to follow the Walden University's rubric and Ed.D. Project Study guide at all times. The residency guided and developed my course of studies at Walden. My studies at Walden have empowered me with the knowledge of knowing that my scholarly experience will positively impact the community that I serve.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

Planning the project required a step-by-step approach to developing the goals and outcomes that reflect the desired outcomes to improve morale and increase teacher retention at the school that is the focus of this study. The project was derived from the conceptual framework of leading change. In order to implement change it is necessary to plan a strategy with the end in mind. While keeping in mind the principles of leading change, the activities and assignments were developed for the professional development project.

While planning and designing the professional development trainings, I learned that in order to provide a quality project, there was a need to study professional development guides on how to effectively facilitate professional development. I participated in an online webinar "Planning Professional Learning" (Fisher & Munger,

2014). Therefore, I recommend the professional development project to engage the principal and the teachers in activities, assignment, and reflections on morale, leading change, participative leadership, and teacher leadership.

The evaluation of the professional development was my first thought throughout the planning and development of the professional developments. I learned how to evaluate the project and that evaluation needed to be an ongoing process. Through research, I learned that it was acceptable to use a variety of evaluation methods (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013).

The principal and teachers will provide feedback after each PD session. I involved the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) in the development of assessment tools for peer expertise and to ensure content accuracy. The summative evaluations will specific knowledge of the presenters and the content of the PD sessions. This evaluation data will assist me as project developer and presenter with future PD sessions. The formative evaluations will be used to refine the goals of each PD training session. Analyzing evaluation data will allow me to reflect upon the process and determine if the project was successful in achieving awareness of leading change to improve. .

### **Leadership and Change**

This study of teachers' perceptions of factors influencing morale has enhanced my knowledge of how colleagues in the profession of education value teaching. The analysis of data from this mixed-method study indicated that both leadership and motivation have an effect on morale. Therefore, the research conducted for the literature review concentrated on leadership and motivation.

Leadership is essential to successfully implement change. I learned the complexity of leading change and that it is essential for leaders to understand the components for change (Fullan, 2014). The principal and teachers will participate in leading change. There is a delicate balance that the principal balances by giving teachers responsibility without abdicating all authority in participative leadership (Wilhelm, 2013). Change in leadership takes time to occur. This change might require three to five years for quality implementation (Fullan, 2014).

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

This project study has led me to transform from a classroom teacher to a scholarly practitioner in education. I believe that status was achieved by investing educational practices through first-hand experiences, knowledge, and expertise from a variety of viewpoints. Throughout my studies, I have become a reflective practitioner through the connection of educational research and reflective practices focusing on education (John, 2013). Through my first-hand experiences, I realize the challenges of central office administrators to support all schools. All failing schools are entitled to support just as schools that are successful. I will use my expertise to provide resources and strategies through PD trainings to achieve and maintain successful schools throughout the district. Leading change is no easy task. It is important to learn what change is best for your school environment and lead the change. I have grown to understand that as a leader, learning has no boundaries.

After contacting a Walden advisor, I was inspired and assured that Walden would provide me with a wealth of resources to guide my studies throughout my doctoral

journey. The program courses at Walden University gave me confidence to embark on each phase of my studies. The challenges I faced as a doctoral student in the Ed.D. Program at Walden University's provided me with opportunities that helped me develop into a scholar of education. As I reflect back to the beginning of this doctoral journey, my motivation was to serve in educators in my community. That has changed and I believe I will serve educators globally. In addition, I believe I have a fair vision of the educational process and I am able to remove bias and seek resolutions to problems.

My vision of professional development is focused on leading change. I believe it is important for the principal to work collaboratively with teachers and other stakeholders to improve morale. I formulated this belief based on my literature reviews and research-based findings from this study. The research based-findings have guided my visions to stimulate the social change needed to improve morale, which is a vital component for school success.

As a scholar, I have acquired the endurance to focus with determination on achieving my professional and personal goal. Through Walden course work, I learned various research methods. Collecting quantitative and qualitative data and summarizing the findings through emerging themes is where my research skills were strengthened (Lodico et al., 2010). This is one of my greatest achievements as a scholar. As a result, I feel confident as a scholar of the educational process to implement professional learning with fidelity to improve morale.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

The doctoral journey has enabled me to grow into an education practitioner. Throughout this journey, I have taken a more in-depth approach to addressing and solving problems by formulating a method for a foundational basis. Cummings and Worley (2014) noted that a researcher diagnoses and solves problems of practice and a practitioner furnishes the researcher with the problems. I have evolved into a practitioner by examining research data from this project study, conducting an extensive literature review, synthesizing the data and literature review, and generating a scholarly declaration that will hopefully lead other educators and practitioners to improve teaching and leadership practices. After developing, conducting and presenting the project study research, I believe that I have invested in my development to operate as a practitioner in the teaching profession. However, my focus as a practitioner was to obtain information accurately and concisely in a meaningful way.

It is imperative for the principal to lead and promote change within the learning community. Implementing participative leadership is a process used to solve problems (Miao, Newman, Schwarz, & Xu, 2013). I have learned that it is important for principals to communicate best practices of the educator for positive student performance, “cultivate a culture based on high expectations, shared responsibility, mutual respect and relational trust” (Englund, 2011, p. 236). It is theoretically sound to implement a participative leadership PD to meet the needs of the principal and the teachers.



### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

I chose to conduct a mixed-methods study in order to develop a deeper understanding of teacher morale, due to a small staff at the school that is the focus of this study. My function, as researcher, was a scholarly practitioner developing a plan, instruments, and the final project based on research findings supported through literature review and personal communication from experts in the field of education. The research findings indicated that teacher morale is low. Therefore, a project was developed to address teachers' perceptions of factor that influence low morale. The procedure I used for this project study consisted of identifying a researchable problem in a local area, designing a systematic methodology to make quantitative measurement, conducting qualitative interviews of areas and attributes to the problem, analyzing data and findings using current technology and using the results to formulate a final project to promote social change.

The project development had a positive impact on my experience while I attended Walden University. I learned the importance of developing and organizing professional development opportunities for educators to practice a new leadership style. This helped me to enhance my organization and leadership skills. These skills allowed me to collaborate with the principal, teachers, and chief academic officer to seek possible solution to low morale. Collaborating with these key stakeholders provided me the opportunity to make a positive difference in this community.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The potential impact on positive social change for this project began with creating an awareness that a problem existed at the school that is the focus of this study. This means that in order to implement change, a problem has been identified. Three categories emerged through data analysis; leadership, support, and motivation. The results of this study demonstrated the need for leadership development and leading change at the school to create social change through improving morale. This study may lead to positive social change at the school by improving morale and increasing the teacher retention rate to improve teacher effectiveness and improve student achievement.

Positive morale is important. Improving morale at the school that is the focus of this study has the potential to decrease the attendance rate, increase student and teacher learning and create a safer work environment (Miller, 2010). During the data collection I learned that it was important to improve morale at school, because it was important for motivating and supporting teachers.

Locally the study aims to improve morale through leadership development. There is limited research on participative leadership for principals and teachers in education. Through the research findings on leadership development, participative leadership, and ways to improve morale this study has the potential to provide social change beyond the school.

Participative leadership has been an interest for more than 40 years to scholars. Although, peer reviewed articles for educators has been limited on participative leadership until recently (Waniganayake, McFarlane, Velez, and Zhang, 2014). This

study provides additional research on the implementation of participative leadership within the realm of shared leading change and teacher leadership.

### **Reflection and Implications**

As I reflect on this project study, I believe it is important to address morale and leading change, participative leadership, and teacher leadership together as one PD initiative. This PD initiative will help to promote training sessions for educators to learn factors that affect low morale. I learned that there was limited research on teachers' perception of morale and factors influencing morale. When researching morale separately I found research from leaders in education as well other organizations.

The results of this project study stem from three major themes: (a), leading change, (b) participative leadership, and (c) teacher leadership that emerged from data generated from surveys and interviews findings. I used these integrated findings to develop this final project. Nevertheless, the goal of this study was to determine whether high or low morale among staff existed at the school that is the focus of this study. The main purpose of this project was to investigate teachers' perceptions of factors that influence morale. The study findings indicated that morale is low and this led to investigating factors that influence morale. Through the process of data collection, I learned that low morale, leadership, support, and motivation were the contributing factors that influenced morale at the school.

In addition, I learned that the contributing factors of low morale affected the teacher retention rate at the school that was the focus of this study. The teacher retention rate was low. This is disturbing for any educator as teacher retention is a priority for

educators. Therefore, improving morale for teachers could increase the teacher retention rate. There are numerous directions for future research on low morale. I could expand my study in five years by comparing elementary school principal's perceptions of factors influencing morale. It would be interesting to find similarities and difference of the principals' perception.

My project's main goal is to encourage the social change needed to improve morale. Improving morale for teachers through leadership change and motivating teachers is important for all stakeholders. This may lead to district's decision to adopt the PD for all principals and teachers. As a result of this project, the district may use what I have learned from this study to make decisions in terms of morale and leading change, participative leadership, and teacher leadership.

### **Applications**

The implementation of participative leaders parallels "The Educational Leaders Guide for Building Morale". Whitaker et al. (2013) noted it is difficult to motivate teachers when morale is low. My intention with the final project is to employ the four emergent themes as areas to frame how the principal can lead change by facilitating PD training and adapting participative leadership.

The final project of this study is a condensed resource that provides guidelines to sustain a collaborative environment for educators to work together as participative leaders using the Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning as a guide. The final project can serve as a checklist and reflection guideline for the principal and teachers to help adapt the participative leadership style:

- Train and provide principal and teachers with the standards for professional learning,
- Train principal and teachers to work collaboratively as a community of learners,
- To guide educators to establish a school culture in which principals and teachers work collaboratively in learning communities,
- To guide the principal and teachers to determine areas of concern, and
- To guide the principal and teachers to address areas of concern.

The goal of the professional development training process is for the principal and teachers to increase the use of best practices, in which educators are motivated and achieve the professional growth necessary to improve student achievement.

### **Future Directions**

The future directions of the PD training process are meant to develop a participative leadership culture in which the principal and teachers share the professional learning process and work collaboratively for school success. This project study reflects primarily on the teachers' perspectives of needing the principal to support teachers to improve morale. Therefore, a subsequent study could be conducted to gather principal perspectives of morale and ways they as school leaders might impact morale. Rather than leading the entire professional development training process, principals need to involve more people in the decision-making process. According to Whitaker et. (2013), this is referred to as participative leadership. Goodwin (2013) wrote "sharing instructional leadership of the school makes good sense" (p. 78). "Teacher leadership

requires thoughtful planning when implementing participative leadership” (Goodwin, p. 78). Future research should involve broadening the scope of this project to provide more information from the principal’s perspectives, and an additional study could follow to research factors or variables that may cause teachers not to participate in online surveys sent through bulk school e-mails related to teacher morale sent from an outside source.

As a result of this project study, I believe that future implications may lead other researchers to explore factors that impact the learning community. Researchers might use alternative means to collect data; for example, surveys can be collected from principals. In addition, principals might be interviewed to generate baseline data that would help researchers gain insight about their prior knowledge and experience of morale in the learning community. Therefore, investigating morale from a principal’s perspective might impact morale in the learning community.

### **Conclusion**

I developed this proposed final study to apply the ideology of the professional development training process so that educators can work together as participative leaders to improve morale. The pathway to positive morale indicated by Moore (2012) provides a relationship between leadership toward improving educational productivity. This project study was intended to provide educators, with means to carry out such training, using the Learning Forward standards as a guide with a concrete process to examine best practices to improve teacher morale. Therefore, it is the intention of this project study to enhance the procurement of leadership strategies to support and motivate teachers, avoiding an authoritative leadership style.

The final project is a guide that can be implemented with minimal training and preparation. It includes checklist, activities, assessments and self-reflection organizers that function to target areas of concern. I developed the final project primarily based on interview responses for the purpose of supporting the principal and teachers who desire to adapt participative leadership. Participative leadership in the school building needs to begin with the principal. Educators who have a broad systems perspective about their organizations are developing into future leaders (Fullan, 2014). “The wisest leaders may do less leading as they create space around them for others to develop and grow” (Cody, 2013, p.69). It is essential that leaders in education value teacher PD trainings; it is a key factor to retaining highly qualified teachers. Improving morale through participative leadership can impact teachers, students, and the school as a whole.

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## Appendix A: The Project

Agenda for Professional Development on Leadership
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Day 1 – Morale and Leading Change
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8:00-8:30	Arrival and sign-in – meet and greet
8:30-9:00	Opening remarks/goals
9:00-9:45	PowerPoint Presentation#1- Study findings and discussion
9:45-10:00	Break
10:00-10:30	<p>Video clip – Why is teacher morale so low? By Born to Learn  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=087ma5Npt6w">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=087ma5Npt6w</a></p> <p>Discuss contributing factors of low morale. Handouts were numbered and teachers are placed in groups according to number received on handout. Select one person from the group to write on the flip chart # 1 the consensus of the group with an explanation with a list of contributing factors identified and a list of factors to improve morale.</p>
10:30-11:30	<p>PowerPoint Presentation #2 - Leading Change</p> <p>Review/discuss the school site goals and mission</p> <p>Video clip on Leading Change by John Kotter  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxtF4OXzhyI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxtF4OXzhyI</a></p> <p>Review/discuss the 8 steps to leading change</p> <p>Identify/list change initiatives that the school site should take to start the change process both short and long term on worksheet #1. List the groups ‘consensus on flip chart #2. Select one person from the group to present.</p>
11:30-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:30	According to the school site’s vision statement discuss the summarized responses and point out similarities and differences among groups.
1:30-1:45	Break
1:45- 3:00	Identify/discuss your leadership role at the school site

Discuss how the group plans to lead at the school site. Select one person from your group to write on flip chart # 3. List each person's leadership role with an explanation of how they plan to lead. Each person will read his or her own response/explanation.

3:00-3:30 Reflections and completion of formative evaluation

*Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of  
Factors Influencing Morale*

Dyna M. Chambers

Walden University  
Richard W. Riley College of Educational Leadership

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Definition of the problem

- Identifying the factors that influence morale at ABC School
- High absenteeism and retention rate are symptoms of low morale
- Low student performance

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Rationale

- Identified elementary school teachers' perceptions of factors influencing morale.

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### Significance

- The significance of this study is to generate an increased interest in improving morale with the ABC School.

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### Research Questions

- Guiding Research Question: What are teachers' perceptions of morale ABC School?
  1. What are teachers' perceptions of factors that influence morale?
  2. What are teachers' perceptions of solutions to improve morale?

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### Findings of the Study

- The outcome of this study produced three categories that served as the foundation for the findings for this study.
- Teachers' perceptions of factors influencing low morale at ABC School have been identified through data analysis as leadership, support, and motivation.

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**Project-Professional Development**

The project has been developed from the findings of this study is a three-day professional development on leadership. These PD sessions are designed for ABC School to adapt participative leadership where the principal and teachers work as a team to share leadership that might improve morale.

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**Social Change**

- The project's potential impact on positive social change begins with creating an awareness of low morale. The study may lead to positive social change at ABC School by improving morale and increasing the teacher retention rate to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

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**Participative Leadership**

- What does it mean to adapt participative leadership? The leader and teachers will share making decisions that reflect the beliefs of the district and school that to promote a positive school.

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Questions/Answers



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Leading Change

Day 1  
Professional Development on Leadership

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What does leading change mean?

Kotter (2012) noted that a leaders' chance at success increases by following the 8-step process:

1. establishing a sense of urgency,
2. forming a powerful guiding coalition,
3. creating a vision,
4. communicating the vision,
5. empowering others to act on the vision,
6. planning for and creating short-term wins,
7. consolidating improvements and producing more change, and
8. institutionalizing new approaches.

"It is important for leadership to be the driver of change" (Kotter, 2012).

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School Leadership

School leadership defines the steps, goals, and objectives to be taken to lead change in the school (Fullan, 2014).

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**ABC School goals and mission**

**District Goals:**  
Increase academic performance and achievement  
Hire and retain committed, qualified staff  
Increase average daily attendance for students

**School Goals:**  
Increase student achievement in Reading, Math, and Science on the State assessment.

**Mission:**  
The mission of ABC School is to promote a positive school environment that includes communication and cooperation among parents, teachers, and the community. Provide high quality teaching, enabling students to become productive, responsible citizens of tomorrow.

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**Eight steps for Leading Change at ABC School**

1. Increase teacher retention,
2. teacher leadership team (each grade level),
3. school goals and mission,
4. principal and teacher newsletters and emails
5. school stakeholders (principal, teachers, study site staff, PTA members, and school district),
6. plan short and long term goals in PD training session,
7. streamline PD for more change, and
8. adapt participative leadership

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Fullan, M. (2014). *Leading in a culture of change personal action guide and workbook*. John Wiley & Sons.

Kotter, J. (2012). The 8-step process for leading change. *The Kotter International Home Page*.

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<p>Worksheet #1 Professional Development on Leadership</p> <p>Day 1</p>
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Short-term goals for leading change:

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Long-term goals for leading change:

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<p>Agenda for Professional Development on Leadership</p>
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<p>Day 2 – Participative Leadership and Adapting Participative Leadership</p>
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- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 8:00-8:15   | Arrival and sign-in   |
| 8:15-8:30   | Discuss reflection notes from day 1 and goals for day 2   |
| 8:30-10:00  | <p>PowerPoint Presentation #3 –Participative Leadership</p> <p>Video clip on Participative leadership by Brock OBHR<br/> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MszLwLycpBo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MszLwLycpBo</a></p> <p>Groups are divided by grade levels. Discuss the role you will play in implementing participative leadership. Complete worksheet #2 by listing role and a brief description of your leadership role.</p> |
| 10:00-10:15 | Break   |
| 10:15-11:30 | Recap/continue worksheet# 2 discussion on participative leadership.   |
| 11:30-12:30 | Lunch   |
| 12:30—1:30  | Whole group activity and discussion. Discuss advantages and disadvantages for adapting participative leadership. Be proactive and develop a schedule with dates and times for teachers to collaborate each month for the remainder of the school year. Also, create a list of topics to discuss and indicate the role of the teacher and the role of the principal on worksheet #3.   |
| 1:30-3:00   | Groups are divided by grade levels. Discuss shared decision making scenarios on how to apply/adapt to participative leadership on worksheet #4. One person from each group will present the responses.  |
| 3:00-3:30   | Reflections and completion of formative evaluation  |

Day 2  
Professional Development on Leadership

Participative Leadership

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Define Participative Leadership

The theory of participative leadership suggest that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. Participative leaders engage teachers in the decision-making process (Cherry, 2012).

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Participative Leadership

Role of the Principal	Role of the Teachers
• Motivate teachers	• Collaborate in team meetings

School principals play a significant role in leading change (Garrison-Wade & Gonzales, 2013).

Whitaker et al. (2013) cited that having teacher leadership is essential to having a great school.

The participative leader works to improve the morale of teachers, school environment, and educational stakeholders (Somech, 2010).

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### Why participative leadership works?

- Participative leadership works because of the specific decision-making process, encouraging creativity, and participation (Blanchard, 2013).
- Teamwork vitalizes the participative leadership process (Costa & Agnol, 2011).




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### How to adapt the participative leadership style and your role

Day 2 Worksheet

Example:

Teacher/Grady	Instructional Specialist	Curriculum Specialist	Data Coach
Curriculum Specialist	Instructional Specialist	Curriculum Specialist	Data Coach
Resource Provider	Classroom Supporter	Curriculum Specialist	Data Coach
Data Coach	Learning Facilitator	Curriculum Specialist	Data Coach
Mentor	Learning Facilitator	Curriculum Specialist	Data Coach

Leadership roles:

Curriculum Specialist	Instructional Specialist
Resource Provider	Classroom Supporter
Data Coach	Learning Facilitator
Mentor	

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### References

Blanchard, A., & Vanderlinden, J. P. (2013). Pre-requisites to interdisciplinary research for climate change: Lessons from a participatory action research process in Hesse-France. *International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 16(1), 1-22.

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Whitaker, T., Whitaker, B., & Lampa, D. (2013). *Motivating & Inspiring Teachers: The educational leader's guide for building staff morale*. Routledge.

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## Worksheet #2 Professional Development on Leadership

## Day 2

Teacher/Grade	Leadership Role	Leadership Actions
	Curriculum Specialist	<p>The Curriculum Specialist is assigned to multiple schools by the CAO to assist principals and teachers. The CS Works to provide one-on-one feedback to struggling teachers. The Curriculum Specialist mentors new and veteran teachers. In addition to mentoring, the curriculum specialist demonstrates knowledge in his or her licensed endorsement area.</p> <p>I will participate in district PD sessions on curriculum and share with my grade level team at the school site.</p>

Teacher/Grade	Leadership Role	Leadership Actions

Worksheet #3 Professional Development on Leadership

Day 2

**List at least 3 participative leadership strategies as they apply to your current position at the school:**

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**Collaboration schedule:**

Team (Grade Level)	Date/Time	Resources needed:	Class supervised by:
Example: 1 <sup>st</sup>	February 16, 2015 7:50 – 10:50a.m.	Lesson plans and student term assessments	First Grade Assistants

**Discussion topics:**

Discussion topic	Principal's Role	Teacher's Role

Worksheet #4 Scenarios Professional Development on Leadership
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Day 2
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## Scenario #1

Today is Teacher A's (1<sup>st</sup> grade) first day of teaching, she doesn't have an assistant teacher. The principal has not hired an assistant teacher. Teacher A has all 27 students lined up in the hallway for lunch. Teacher B (2<sup>n</sup> grade) a 5 year veteran teacher, knows the lunch schedule and realizes that Teacher A has arrived 30 minutes before her allocated lunch time. In the meantime, one of Teacher A's student named Emily leaves her place in the middle of the line and go back to the end of the line and strikes John in the face.

List the problems encountered by Teacher A and remember that it's still morning:

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As a veteran teacher that has adapted to participative leadership how do you assist teacher A?

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## Scenario #2

During the summer break, Teacher C (3<sup>rd</sup> grade) attended three district sponsored professional development sessions on curriculum and instruction for K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. The principal has emailed all teachers notifying everyone to participate in 2-day PD training at the school. The principal has requested that Teacher C presents at this PD training. This training is mandatory. Teacher C has scheduled an outpatient procedure for day 2 of the PD training.

As a participative leader, list 3 options for Teacher C with strategies.

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## Scenario #3

Teacher D (5<sup>th</sup> grade) is in the front office during dismissal answering a call from an upset parent about dismissal procedures. Teacher D completes her phone call, when exiting the office, the music enters the office with two students and one has a nose bleed. The student is crying and the second student leaves out running down the hallway. These students have been fighting. The office manager tells the music teacher that neither the principal nor assistant principal are on the school's campus.

As a participative leader, how Teacher D should assist?

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## Scenario #4

Teacher G has asked the principal for the extra mobile cart with 4 laptops for her classroom. The principal tells Teacher G that he will get back her on this matter.

Do you think the principal gave Teacher G with the correct response? Why?

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What other responses would be appropriate?

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<p>Agenda for Professional Development on Leadership</p>
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<p>Day 3 – Teacher Leadership</p>
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|-------------|--|
| 8:00-8:15   | Arrival and sign   |
| 8:15-8:30   | Discuss reflection notes from day 2 and goals for day 3  |
| 8:30-9:45   | <p>PowerPoint Presentation #4 – Teacher Leadership</p> <p>Discussion questions – Groups are divided by grade levels. One person from each group will select a discussion questions from a box. Each group will discuss the questions.</p>  |
| 9:45-10:00  | Break  |
| 10:00-11:00 | One person from each group will present the responses on flip chart #4.  |
| 11:00-12:00 | Lunch  |
| 12:00-1:30  | <p>PowerPoint Presentation #5 – Building School Morale</p> <p>Building school morale - whole group discussion</p>  |
| 1:30-1:45   | Break  |
| 1:45-3:00   | Case studies – Groups are divided by grade levels. Read the case assigned to your group. Each group will identify strategies and solutions to leading change on flip chart #4. One person from each group will present the responses of strategies and solution to the case study. |
| 3:00-3:30   | Reflection and completion of summative evaluation  |

5/31/15

**Teacher Leadership**  
Day 3  
Professional Development on Leadership

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**Is this the time for Teacher Leadership?**  
Three promising trends for teacher leadership:  
1. A need to share  
Principals alone can't run a school (Barth, 2013). Teachers are invested when principals share leadership roles.

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**Is this the time for Teacher Leadership continued**  
2. Curriculum development  
With the Common Core Standards, principals aren't about to write a curriculum (Barth, 2013). Teachers are invited to design the methods of instruction. Barth (2013) noted teachers have usually been told what they're going to teach and how they're going to teach it. This new development is a profound form of teacher leadership.

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5/31/15

**Is this the time for Teacher Leadership  
continued**

3. New model of leadership  
Provide teachers with opportunities to create new curriculum standards, select their new colleagues, and conduct peer evaluations (Barth, 2013).

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**Teacher Leadership – Problem Solvers**

It is important to acknowledge teachers as problem solvers. Team teachers in the United States are working to improve their schools. The leadership role in education must be inspired and give space to teachers' problem-solving ability (Sacks, 2013).

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**Teacher Leadership – Support Their Peers**

Peer assistance and review (PAR) programs improve teacher leadership in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

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5/31/15

**Teacher Leadership – Teachers with drive**

Teacher might stay in the classroom with more leadership opportunities (Coggins & Diffenbaugh, 2013).

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**Teacher Leadership – A New Way to Motivate**

- Mastery, purpose, and autonomy provides a new way to motivate teachers with useful framework to maintain their sense of drive for long-term success.

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**Teacher Leadership – A New Way to Motivate**

- Mastery – An established focus on the responsibilities of the job.
- Purpose – Teachers with a purpose have pursued teaching as a way to have a positive effect on individuals and society.
- Autonomy – Provide teachers with a choice to be both autonomous and positively interdependent with others (Coggins & Diffenbaugh, 2012).

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5/31/15

**Teacher Leadership – The Essential Ingredient**

Leadership Team Meeting – Team members can use these meetings to hone their skills by:

- Exchanging feedback on the quality of teacher leaders' observation notes, data analysis, and feedback.
- Practicing or role-playing the meetings peer coaches will have on teachers.
- Planning, practicing, and professional development sessions

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**References**

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Coggins, C., & Diffenbaugh, P. K. (2013). Teachers with drive. *Leadership, 10*, 13.

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Sacks, A. (2013). The Problem-Solving Power of Teachers. *Leveraging Teacher Leadership, 7*(2), 18-22.

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Discussion Questions for Professional Development on Leadership
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Day 3 - Teacher Leadership
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1. As a leader in your school, how do you motivated?
2. As a leader, in your school when do you encounter apathy, resistance, curiosity, and enthusiasm?
3. As teachers and as a leader, to what degree do you think teachers feel empowered to make curriculum and instructional decisions that affect student success.
4. What are the conditions of professional development trainings in your school and district?
5. Identify 5 goals to improve morale and provide a rationale for each goal.

5/31/15

Building School Morale  
Day 3  
Professional Development on Leadership

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An Open Letter on Teacher Morale

What builds and sustains school morale?

1. Give teachers what they ask for. Teachers are left without so many resources. This is an often overlooked but crucial way an administrator builds trust.
2. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Every conversation with teachers, whether it's about curriculum, testing, or evaluation, needs to be driven by the knowledge of the teacher as an individual, and not the other way around.
3. Treat teachers like adults. Teachers have to know that they're number one.
4. Play with the gray. You navigate the system to get things done for your teachers.
5. Remember that morale is only a side effect. Teacher morale is the end product of empowering teachers to make decisions that affect their lives (Strasser, 2014).

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A School with Purpose

Schools are not just centers for the production of learning. It's a place in which educators break down curriculum boundaries to work collaboratively, planning and teaching with creativity and with the steady purpose of producing better adults, caring, competent people who will live deeply satisfying lives and contribute to an evolving democratic society. Working in such a good cause, teachers are bound to have high morale (Noddings, 2014).

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High Morale

High morale depends on feeling appreciated, and because educators are rarely given their due, we need to appreciate one another. When school leaders respect and believe in their teachers, everyone wins ( Esquith, 2014).

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Words that Encourage

The language administrative leaders use has the power to build or destroy teacher morale (Eisenbach, 2014).

Words Matter – Administrators must use words that promote development and reflection rather than language that leads to demoralization and apathy.

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Benefits of Being Positive

Danielson (2011) described skilled administrator that evaluate teachers, as those who support teachers and engage teachers in productive conversations about their practice.

Positive feedback can improve instructional development as well as teacher morale (Eisenbach, 2014).

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5/31/15

 **Takeaways - Memos About Morale**

Freedom to plan and teach creatively is conducive to both higher morale and a deeper sense of responsibility.  
- Nel Noddings

Teacher morale is not a function of practices designed to maintain or create it. It's a by-product of being treated as leaders and being treated with respect.  
- Dina Strasser

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**References**

Eisenbach, B. B. (2014). Words That Encourage. *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*, 71(5), 70-72.

Esquith, R. (2014). Can't Wait for MONDAY. *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*, 71(5), 20-22.

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Case Studies for Professional Development on Leadership
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Day 3 -: Teacher Leadership
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## Case Study # 1:

Following a decline in morale, the school site needed to create a school improvement plan in order to sustain teaching and learning. The school site needs to engage all stakeholders to lead change more effectively.

## Key Issues:

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## The Solutions:

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## Cast Study # 2:

The superintendent has called a meeting with all district leaders to discuss the decline in student test scores. The district needs to develop a plan to for all failing schools to improve test scores so that the district can move from failing to average. The district needs strategic objectives involving leadership inspiring staff throughout the strategic planning and implementation.

## Key Issues:

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## The Solutions:

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Case Studies for Professional Development on Leadership
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Day 3 - Module 3: Teacher Leadership
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## Case Study#3

The teacher retention rate has decreased for the past 3 years. The administrative leader has been asked to develop an organizational plan that aligns with the school district that provides strategies to retain highly qualified teachers.

Key Issues:

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The Solutions:

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## Case Study#4

The Department of Education has required full implementation of Common Core Standards. Each school has been asked by the superintendent to develop a plan of instruction to accommodate their learning community according to the department of education's curriculum guide.

Key Issues:

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The Solutions:

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## **Handout for Professional Development on Leadership**

### **Strategies to adapt Participative Leadership**

1. Leadership is an issue and the only way to fix it is by the principal and teachers leading change to adapt participative leadership at the school site.
2. Principal leadership with teacher leadership equals participative leadership:
  - Principal leadership leads change by influencing teacher's professional development, promotion, retention, tenure, and certification to improve schools
  - Teacher leadership demonstrates teachers in leadership roles sharing their talents and knowledge in education.
  - Participative leadership style promotes joint decision making between the principal and teachers
3. How do we adapt participative leadership?
  - Change leadership behaviors to participative leadership
  - Create a schedule for teachers and the principal to meet and be consistent
  - Communicate with teachers via email asking for suggestions on topics to discuss
  - Teacher leadership - Each teacher has a leadership role on their grade level team
  - Reserve time for teachers to collaborate
4. What do we discuss?
  - Curriculum  
Share ideas, lessons, projects, etc.
  - Student assessments  
Formal and informal
  - Data  
District and state  
Formative and summative testing
  - Interventions  
RTI
5. Constraints will occur; be prepared by:
  - Learning to continue working around constraints
  - Overcome time by scheduling meeting times and sticking to the schedule
6. Celebrate all school success by:
  - Principal emails
  - Principal and grade level monthly newsletters
  - Daily intercom announcements
  - PTA meetings

Professional Development Formative Evaluation

## Day 1 and Day 2

*Professional Development Formative Evaluation Feedback*

	Excellent		Average		Poor
	5	4	3	2	1

Questions:

Presentations were well organized and will enhance my professional growth

Objectives were clearly stated

The activities motivated me to want to adapt participative leadership

A new concept I learned today:

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I would like to learn more about:

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What should be done differently for the remainder of the professional development?

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## Professional Development Summative Evaluation

## Day 3

Date:

Presenter(s):

Please respond to each item by circling the number which best describes your opinion.

(5=excellent through 1=poor)

Excellent Average PoorA. Process – Teaching activities and materials

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Presentations were well organized                                  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. Objectives were clearly stated                                     | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. Activities and assignments were relevant to objectives             | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. All necessary materials/equipment/resources were readily available |   |   |   |   |   |
|   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. Overall presentation   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Excellent Average PoorB. Content

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have developed an awareness and knowledge from the content of the session that is relevant for my professional development | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. The content of the presentation is relevant to improving morale at the study site  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. The activities empowered me to want work as collaboratively with my team and adapt participative leadership                  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. The activities enhanced the participants professional growth   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

How did the professional development sessions relate to your job, and in what way(s) has it caused you to review your position or leadership role?


What new ideas have you learned and how do you plan to implement these new ideas at your school site?


What information was of greatest value to you?


What suggestions do you have to improve today's professional development session?


Additional comments/suggestions:


## Appendix B: Principal's Authorization Letter to Conduct the Study



## Appendix A: Letter from the Principal to Conduct Research

Dear Researcher:

I have met with you, and we have discussed your research proposal. I hereby grant my permission to conduct the research titled *Elementary School Teachers' Perception of Factors Influencing Morale*, as proposed in my school. As part of this study, I authorize you to survey and interview staff members that provide the proper form of consent to take part in your study. I understand that individual interviews will be conducted after school hours and not during school hours.

Please keep in mind that individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. In addition, faculty and staff names and other confidential information as well as school information will not be disclosed in the research. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

Sincerely,



Appendix C: Letter from District’s Research Review Committee to  
Conduct Study

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Mrs [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Review committee has approved your request to conduct your study, **“Elementary School Teachers’ perception of Factors Influencing Morale”**. Please ensure that all information pertaining to individuals’ identity and facilities used in the research remain anonymous. This letter certified that your study will be conducted during 2014-2015 school year is limited to [REDACTED] Elementary School. The study and data collection process is approved for the 2014-2015 although before beginning your research at the selected site (s), you are required to present a copy of this letter along with your IRB approval letter to the site’s administrator.

If you should need further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact our office. Best wishes on your research.

[REDACTED]



## Appendix D: Email Invitation Letter to Participants and Consent Form

### **Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Morale**

This study will be conducted to ascertain teachers' perception of morale. I am the researcher, [REDACTED], a doctoral student at Walden University. You are invited to take part in a research study titled "Elementary School Teachers' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Morale". The researcher is asking you to take part because you meet the eligibility criteria for participation in the study. The eligibility criteria include being a full-time elementary school teacher and holding the state's teaching credential. The researcher, or district, will not gain financially from the findings of the study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

#### **Background Information:**

The completion of this research project will facilitate the inclusion of the teaching staff to properly address teachers' perception of morale, factors that influence morale and perceptions of suggestions to improve morale.

#### **Procedures:**

All certified licensed teachers will be invited to participate in the study. If you agree to be in this study, you will receive an email from me with a link to the electronic survey. Please reply to the email with the words "I Consent". Following completion of the survey, I will interview the first 12 teachers who complete the survey. The survey is expected to take less than 30 minutes to complete about teachers' perception of morale. The interview will include questions about whether you believe morale at this school is high or low, why do you believe morale is high or low, how morale affects your job as a teacher and what action you think could be taken to improve morale at this school. The interview will last approximately 15-30 minutes. With your permission, the researcher would like to tape-record the interview. Member checking will be used to determine the accuracy of findings. This allows participants the opportunity of making sure their transcribed notes are accurate.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation is voluntary in this study, everyone's decision whether or not you want to be in the study is respected. If you decide not to be in the study, no individual will be treated differently. Participants have the right to decline or discontinue participation. Declining or discontinuing will not negatively impact the participant's relationship with the researcher or the participant's access to services. At any time during the study, you can change your mind about participating in the study. In addition, you may stop at any time if you feel stress during the study. If you feel a question is too personal, you may skip that question.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Participation in this study involves minimal risk. Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as you might become stressed. The study site will benefit from this study by learning teachers' perceptions of moral the study site.

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The information you provide will be confidential. I will not use your information for any purposes outside of this project study. In addition, your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study will not be identified. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in this study reports. Data will be kept secure on a password secure computer. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Conflicts of Interest:**

I am currently a grant coordinator for the district. This study is separate from my position of grant coordinator. The position of grant coordinator does not determine if teachers receive various grants in the school district of study.

Survey Link:

[REDACTED]

**Contacts and Questions:**

Please feel free to contact me with any questions, at [REDACTED] or via email [REDACTED]. You may want to contact my doctoral committee chairperson, [REDACTED], who can discuss the study with you. If participants have questions about their rights, contact Walden's Research Participant Advocate at [REDACTED]. Please print or save this consent form for your records. Walden University's approval number for this study is 07-25-14-0082462 and it expires on July 24, 2015.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Participant Informed Consent Form Statement of Consent:

I have read the participant letter with the purpose of study, information, and understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By emailing "I Consent", I am agreeing to the terms described in the participant letter.

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's written signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's written signature \_\_\_\_\_

The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your records.

## Appendix E: Teacher Morale and School Culture Survey

Created by [REDACTED]

Adapted by [REDACTED]

Please complete this survey as accurately and honestly as you can. Your responses will remain strictly confidential. Provide the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement by choosing the number, which represents your answer:

4 if you strongly agree 3 if you agree, 2 if you disagree, or 1 if you strongly disagree.

(Numbers are typed before each item on the online survey for the participants to choose only one answer).

1. I am completely satisfied with my working conditions.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
2. The administrative staff at my school is always visible and accessible.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
3. My administrators give appropriate evaluative criticisms about teaching style.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
4. I am given opportunities and supported by administration to grow in my profession.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
5. I am kept informed of professional development activities.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree

6. The administrative staff of my school expresses personal interest in my work.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
7. Teachers do not have an open invitation to visit administrative offices and to seek support.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
8. Volunteers are available to assist teachers in various ways.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
9. Administration seldom acknowledges teachers' birthdays, sickness, accomplishments, etc.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
10. The administration at my school shows appreciation for teachers' hard work.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
11. Teachers feel welcome to approach administrative staff for support.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
12. My morale during this school year is high, and I am happy to come to school each day.
  - 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree

13. The morale of most other teachers I know at my school is high.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
14. I often feel overextended in my work at my school.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
15. Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
16. Morale is important to school success.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
17. Team collaboration helps to improve morale.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
18. Opportunities exist for staff to collaborate.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
19. Administrators acknowledge the morale of teachers.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
20. I believe stress causes a teacher to feel whether morale is low or high.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree

- 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
21. I feel morale is high.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
22. I feel morale is low.
- 4 Strongly agree
  - 3 agree
  - 2 disagree
  - 1 Strongly disagree
23. What is your gender?
- Male
  - Female
24. What is your race?
- White
  - Black or African American
  - American Indian
  - Alaska Native
  - Native Hawaiian
  - Pacific Islander
  - Asian
25. What position are you currently assigned to teacher?
- Pre-Kindergarten
  - Kindergarten
  - First
  - Second
  - Third
  - Forth
  - Fifth
  - Resource Staff (Counselor, Music, Gifted, Literacy, Exceptional Education, Library)
26. Please indicate the Mississippi Teaching License you presently hold:
- A = Bachelor's degree license
  - AA = Master's degree license
  - AAA = Specialist degree license
  - AAAA = Doctorate degree license

27. Teaching Experience:

- Early career 0 - years
- Mid-career 6 – 15 years
- Late career 16 – 26 years or more

Thompson, Jacquelyn (2009). Perceptions of teachers on the impact of principal leadership on the culture and morale of an elementary school. Ph.D. dissertation, Prescott Valley, Arizona. Retrieved from Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University. (Publication No. 3348196).



## Appendix F:

## Interview Protocol and Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Reflection Notes

Thank you for volunteering to participate in a research study of teachers' perceptions of factors influencing morale in an elementary school. The researcher is inviting certified elementary teachers to be in the study. The purpose of the study is to determine if morale is low and the contributing factors that cause morale to be low or high. The interview will take 15 to 30 minutes, and all information will remain confidential. I will be recording the interview and you will be asked to review the findings of the study for the purpose of member checking.

**Primary research question to be addressed in the study:**

What are teachers' perceptions of morale at the study site; is morale high or low?

Interviewee: Participant 111      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_      Location: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Secondary and probing questions:</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Interviewer's Notes/Interpretation Positive or Negative</b>
Do you believe the morale at this school is high or low? (Guiding RQ)		
Why do you believe morale is high or low? (RQ #2)		
Describe how morale affects your job as a teacher? (RQ #1)		
What are some actions you think could be taken to improve morale at this school? (RQ # 2)		

## Appendix G: Permission to use Teacher Morale and School Culture Survey

TO: [REDACTED]  
FROM: [REDACTED]

RE: Letter of Consent/Permission to Use

DATE: September 7, 2015

I am [REDACTED] the author of *Perceptions of Teachers on the Impact of Principal Leadership on the Culture and Morale of an Elementary School*. This letter of consent with permission to use and reprint the research questions in my doctoral study, "Teacher Morale and School Culture Survey",

[REDACTED] has provided me background information, procedures, nature of the study, and any other information in reference to her study, "Elementary School Teacher Perception of Factors Influencing Morale".

*Statement of Consent:*

I have read the participant letter with the purpose of the study, information, and understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described in the participant letter.

Printed Name:

Date of Consent:

Signature of Consent:

[REDACTED]

### Appendix H: Follow-up Letter to Participants

Dear Participants,

This email is a reminder to complete the Teacher Morale and School Culture survey. The survey will be open for 4 more days.

I appreciate your participation and responses. Your responses will benefit from the study by learning teachers' perceptions of morale at the school.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration to participate in my doctoral study. I have provided the survey link below; please click on the link to complete the survey.

Yours in Education,

### Appendix I: Thank You Letter to Participants

Dear Participants,

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration in completing the Teacher Morale and School Culture survey. Taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in my doctoral study will be a tremendous contribution to the field of education.

Your participation and responses will help your school investigate teacher morale. it is my goal that this information is useful to you, your principal, and all other stakeholders to improve teacher and student learning .

Yours in Education,

## Appendix J: Frequencies and Percentages on Responses for Each Survey Question

Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Survey question I am completely satisfied with my working conditions.	0	0	8	42	11	58	0	0
The administrative staff at my school is always visible and accessible.	0	0	0	0	15	79	4	21
My administrators give appropriate evaluative criticisms about teaching.	1	5	7	37	11	58	0	0
I am given opportunities and supported by administration to grow in my profession.	1	5	7	37	10	53	1	5
I am kept informed of professional development activities.	1	5	7	37	10	53	1	5
The administrative staff of my school expresses personal interest in my work.	1	5	9	47	9	47	0	0
Teachers do not have an open invitation to visit administrative offices and seek support.	0	0	9	47	10	53	0	0
Volunteers are available to assist teachers in various ways.	7	37	5	26	6	32	1	5
Administration seldom acknowledges teachers' birthdays, sickness, accomplishments, etc.	6	32	7	37	6	32	0	0
The administration at my school shows appreciation for teachers' hard work.	0	0	6	32	13	68	0	0
Teachers feel welcome to approach administrative staff for support.	0	0	11	58	5	26	1	5
My morale during this school year is high, and I am happy to come to work each day.	1	5	6	32	11	58	1	5
The morale of most other teachers I know at my school is high.	2	11	11	58	6	32	0	0
I often feel overextended in my work at my school.	0	0	3	16	10	53	6	32
Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.	4	21	6	32	9	47	0	0
Morale is important to school success.	0	0	0	0	3	16	16	84
Team collaboration helps to improve morale.	0	0	0	0	6	32	13	68
Opportunities exist for staff to collaborate.	1	5	5	26	13	68	0	0

Administrators acknowledge the morale of teachers.	8	42	4	21	7	37	0	0
I believe stress causes a teacher to feel whether morale is low or high.	0	0	0	0	6	32	13	68
I feel morale is high at the school.	8	42	5	26	4	21	2	11
I feel morale is low at the school.	0	0	4	21	9	47	6	32

*Note.* Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding error.

## Appendix K: National Institutes of Health (NIH) Certificate of Completion

