

STAFF MORALE, SCHOOL CLIMATE, AND EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

Student achievement, teacher attitudes, and an environment that fosters learning are all influenced by the quality of administrative leadership.

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External and internal pressures to improve pupil social behavior and academic performance continue. Our major response has been to increase discipline and remediation, but the results have not been encouraging. Largely ignored is the considerable research that indicates another, perhaps more productive, route to facilitating student growth. There is evidence that the social climate of the school and the morale of the staff can have a positive effect on pupil attitudes and learning. Improving the climate and morale also makes teaching more pleasant.

Staff Morale

Daniel Griffiths (1956) said, "If it can be shown that groups which achieve their goals efficiently exhibit a high degree of cohesiveness, think well of their leaders, do not fight much among themselves, agree on their objectives, have confidence in their equipment, and so on, then these manifestations represent high morale, but only if a relationship to goal achievement can be shown."

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It's not difficult to tell when a staff has high morale. In a school with a positive spirit, teachers:

- Look forward to going to work in the morning and are not in a hurry to leave in the evening;
- Exhibit concern for the direction in which the school and the programs are moving;
- Actively participate in school functions, committees, and organizations;
- Willingly perform various school tasks that are above and beyond their stated duties;
- Derive satisfaction from being a member of the school system and teaching profession;
- Are supportive of the school, its goals, and philosophy; and
- Are actively engaged in improving school-community relations.¹

Administrative behavior is a highly important factor in facilitating good staff morale. Administrators can have a direct, positive impact on teacher morale by:

- Praising and giving credit when it is warranted;
- Supporting the teacher in conflicts with students and parents;
- Giving special attention to the teacher's physical comfort and other related matters;
- Assuming responsibility for their administrative actions;
- Demonstrating that they are knowledgeable about current school methods, materials, strategies, and practices; and
- Encouraging the teachers' professional growth.

School Climate

Another vital element in a productive learning environment and one that is directly related to staff morale is the

Figure 1. Suggestions for Activities to Improve Morale

Target Group:

All administrative and teacher leaders at the central office and building levels.

Activity:

Provide leadership development in areas such as:

- Identifying and analyzing leadership style.
- Establishing effective interpersonal relations.
- Fostering a productive learning and work climate.
- Strengthening participative management skills and team-building.

—Increasing autonomy at the building level.

- Respecting and encouraging the autonomy of individuals within the school system.
- Recognizing, rewarding, and publicizing staff and student efforts and accomplishments.

Target Group:

All staff

Activity:

Consider establishing a program such as the Grand Rapids, Michigan, Public Schools "CONTACT." (This activity is a source of help and support to employees of the Grand Rapids Public Schools and their immediate family members. It is available to help with personal problems on a 24-hour, 7-day basis. Information may be secured from: Roland Lubbinge, Assistant Superintendent of Employee Relations, The Grand Rapids Public Schools, 143 Bostwick Avenue, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.)

Encourage formation of informal communication networks and support groups which would meet on issues of common interest and concern.

In order for many programs to be effectively implemented, staff members need orientations to, commitment to, and training in the philosophy and methods of the program.

Target Group:

Teachers

Activity:

Provide inservice education in David N. Aspy's *Humanistic Teaching*. This training helps a teacher to be empathic, congruent, and a valuing person. David N. Aspy, College of Education, Texas Women's University, Denton, Texas 76204.

Offer training in Art Costa's *Enabling Behaviors*. This program helps teachers become aware of their be-

haviors that facilitate learning, and increases the teachers' ability to perform and to analyze their own behaviors. Arthur L. Costa, *Enabling Behaviors*, California State University at Sacramento. General Learning Press, 250 James Street, Morristown, New Jersey 07960.

Target Group:

Elementary students

Activity:

Initiate William Glasser's *Schools Without Failure* and reality therapy. This program consists of a program of staff inservice education and then class meetings and use of the seven steps in reality therapy with students. Educator Training Center, 100 East Ocean Boulevard, Suite 906, Long Beach, California 90802.

Provide the *Human Development Program* and use *Magic Circle* techniques. Students, with their teacher as leader, explore ways to gain self-confidence, and take increased responsibility for their own behavior. Human Development Training Institute, 7574 University Avenue, La Mesa, California 92041.

Target Group:

Secondary students

Activity:

Initiate additional *Successful Secondary Schools*. Based on Glasser's *Schools Without Failure* and reality therapy, this program has had a positive impact on student and staff attitudes and school climate. LaBarbara Gagg, Director; Successful Secondary Schools, Wayne County Intermediate School District, 33500 Van Born Road, Wayne, Michigan 48184.

Offer *Quest*. Improves the quality of family life and provides positive mental health by helping teenagers and their parents. *Quest, Skills for Living*, 2707 North Main Street, Findley, Ohio 45840.

Utilize *Interchange*. This is the *Human Development Program* at the secondary level.

Establish *Moral Education* and the concept of the school as a just society. These concepts developed by Kohlberg involve the use of moral dilemmas and organization of schools on a democratic basis. Lawrence Kohlberg, Harvard Center for Moral Education, Roy E. Larson Hall, Appian Way, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.

school climate. School climate refers to the milieu within which staff and students live. This environment can range from a closed to an open climate. A closed climate is characterized by a confining, concealing, restricting atmosphere where staff is often apathetic and concern is that students complete tasks in an orderly and quiet manner. An open climate consists of an accepting, honest atmosphere where the faculty shows a balance in concern for task achievement and social needs satisfaction.

A positive school climate is characterized by staff and student cohesiveness, high morale, and an environment where caring, mutual respect, and trust are evident.

These factors are enhanced by opportunities to participate in decisions, deep involvement in activities, and high levels of communication. Experience has shown that such a climate results in identifying and using more effective teaching-learning strategies, improved pupil academic and social growth, increased problem-solving ability, greater goal identification, and a high commitment to the school and its renewal.

Four separate studies by Robert and Ruth Soar looked at the significance of classroom climate on low socioeconomic status (SES) children (Rouk, 1979). Their research indicates that a negative climate, in which the teacher is severely critical of students and spends much of the day rebuking children for poor behavior, is undesirable for learning. On the other hand, they found no support for the belief that a warm classroom climate *alone* produced increased achievement. Most achievement gains took place in classrooms with a "neutral" climate but where students were encouraged to explore ideas and concepts.

However, Aspy and Roebuck (1974) report that the climate established by teachers has a very significant impact on students' attitudes toward learning, on problem-solving ability, and on classroom morale. Aspy and associates hypothesized that constructive personality change could be fostered in one person by a second person who was: (a) empathic, (b) congruent, and (c) valuing of the first person.

Their study investigated the rela-

tionship between the teacher's levels of facilitative interpersonal conditions and the cognitive growth of third grade students. The data indicated that a teacher who provides high levels of facilitative conditions tends to enhance students' cognitive growth, but a teacher who provides low levels of these conditions may retard students' learning.

Aspy also found that:

1. Teachers can change when they work in situations with high levels of facilitative conditions. Moreover, they tend to translate their new behaviors into classroom practice that enhances students' involvement in the learning process.

2. Teachers with "high (interpersonal) functioning" had lower pupil absence, higher achievement, fewer discipline problems, more parent involvement, and so on.

3. Race is not a significant factor in the variability of facilitative conditions or in the effectiveness of the conditions.

As further support for the importance of climate research, Brookover and others (1976) found that:

More of the differences in achievement could be attributed to the differences found in academic climate than could be attributed to differences in socio-economic status or racial composition.

There is also a definite relationship between leader behavior and teacher behavior. It has been found that administrators can play an important role in establishing a healthful climate by:

- Modeling actions they wish to see other staff and students develop.

- Having credibility as educational leaders: (1) visiting classrooms *often* (asking questions about methodology); (2) holding discussions with students; (3) showing interest in new ideas; (4) being visible and accessible.

- Developing realistic ways of handling priorities (students first, teachers second, parents third, paperwork fourth).

- Being face-to-face oriented: (1) delivering messages personally; (2) holding conferences in teachers' classrooms; (3) giving positive feedback to staff; (4) spending time in the teachers' lounge during lunch (if possible).

• Being honest and fair with staff (providing for staff involvement in decision making).

• Being willing and able to delegate authority.

• Being supportive of creative teachers.

• Being service oriented (What can I do to help?).

• Being conscious of needs and concerns of the community.²

Productivity in Education

The measurement of productivity in a school system must relate to the social and academic growth of its students. A basic question, then, is: How is a productive learning climate created?

The analysis of research identifies the important role of school administrators as "climate determiners." A study by Keeler and Andrews (1963) found that leader behavior of second level leaders (principals and cadre leaders) is significantly related to test achievement of followers. The researchers stated:

All of the statistics give strong support to the hypothesis that leader behavior of the principal, as perceived by his staff, was

significantly related to the productivity of the schools. . . . The weight of evidence supported the hypothesis that the morale of the staff of a school . . . was related to productivity.

Further corroboration can be found in a study of two New York inner-city schools (Office of Education Performance Review, 1974). In this investigation, it was found that important differences in pupil learning can occur between schools with nearly identical facilities, staff, and low income student enrollment. The report concludes:

The findings of this study suggest that the differences in pupils' reading achievement in these two schools were primarily attributable to administrative policies, behavior, procedures, and practices. Effectiveness of teaching, training, and experience of teachers, appropriateness and availability of materials, and approaches to teaching reading did not differ significantly between the schools. The abilities of the schools' administrative team, however, were very different. In School A, the principal and his assistant principals were able to run an orderly, peaceful, and efficient school with a high degree of cooperation from pupils, teachers, and parents. In this atmosphere, decisions based on educational criteria could be put in practice and children could learn more. In School B, the principal and his assistant principals had

difficulty eliciting cooperation from staff, community, and pupils and implementing educational policy. Children in School B had less opportunity to learn.

The importance and interrelatedness of staff morale, school climate, and educational productivity to pupil learning and effective staff performance cannot be denied. The impact of the leader's behavior as a key element in establishing good morale is strongly supported. This is true whether the leader is a teacher whose behavior affects his or her students or an administrator whose management style influences staff morale.

Implications For Action

Obviously, behaviors which will improve staff and student morale and produce an improved school climate must be fostered. If efforts are to be successful, there must be participation of staff and the resources of the district must be marshaled. In addition, promising programs developed elsewhere should be investigated. The suggestions in Figure 1 are examples of the steps (activities and programs) that may be initiated.

¹ Paraphrased from R. Washington and H. Wilson, *NASSP Bulletin*, April 1976.

² Adapted from Marc Robert, *Loneliness in Schools*, Niles, Ill.: Argus Community Press, 1973. ■

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