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## Factors that Affect Teacher Morale

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## Teacher Morale Defined

Although teacher morale may be defined in multiple ways, most definitions include two themes: teachers have personal needs and the (Bentley R R Rempel A M 1970 Manual for the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire) perceived realization of these needs within the organization often impacts their state of mind and performance. According to Webster's Dictionary (2010), morale is a person's mental state that is exhibited by assurance, control, and motivation to perform a task. Bentley and Rempel (1970) defined teacher morale as the degree to which the needs of a person are satisfied, and the person's perception of how the job situation brought the state of satisfaction of the worker to fruition. As cited in the Administrator's Handbook for Improving Faculty Morale (Andrews, 1985), Smith defines morale as a confident state of mind that progressively looks to achieve an essential and shared function.

## Teacher Morale and Student Achievement

Historically, the research on teacher morale and its affect on student achievement has been positively correlated. In 1985, *Phi Delta Kappan* conducted a comprehensive study in five states, with similar results. The author emphasized that the Hopkins-Layton (1981) investigation established a positive correlation between teacher attendance and student achievement (Andrews, 1985). Teachers with low morale took personal and sick days at a high rate because of their state of mind, which could have possibly been linked to a decrease in student achievement.

Looking specifically at student achievement, Andrews (1985) asserted that teachers with high morale put more work into their jobs and students. Students who had good relationships with their teachers felt a closer connection with teachers with high morale because these teachers showed a deeper interest in their development, thus possibly increasing achievement (Andrews, 1985). Lumsden (1998) affirmed Andrews' position that teacher morale influenced student achievement. In addition, Lumsden (1998) believed that low teacher morale negatively affected worker productivity and those teachers became detached from the students. Low teacher morale was identified as the possible reason for low student achievement, unfavorable school and classroom climate, and poor personal health (Lumsden, 1998). Recently, Houchard (2005) studied teacher morale and student achievement using the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire and the students' final grades. The findings supported previous work regarding student achievement. While these findings did not show a cause and effect relationship, it can be concluded from the research that the teacher's state of mind and ability to foster a positive climate can have an impact on student learning.

## Factors that Affect Teacher Morale

In schools every day, school leaders and district administrators are experimenting with innovations in an effort to improve teacher performance. Though some initiatives hold great merit and may possess the ability to transform a school district's achievement rating, a number of good ideas and resources are wasted. Teachers, the frontline school workers, are either not prepared, or do not have the motivation to carry out the needed improvements. Motivation, effort, and job satisfaction can be linked

to teacher morale (Huysman, 2008). Before school leaders can be successful change agents, it may be important to know the factors that affect teacher morale.

From a study conducted in a rural Florida school district, Huysman (2008) concluded that job satisfaction was tied to intrinsic factors such as security, ability utilization, and social service. Job dissatisfaction was linked to extrinsic factors that included compensation, authority, company policies, advancement, recognition, politics, bargaining, and distribution of power. Intrinsic factors including security, variety, ability utilization, social services, and personal activity were correlated with job satisfaction (Huysman, 2008). These findings were affirmed in a recent article posted in *The Record*. The author postulated that teacher morale in the Lodi Unified School district was low because teachers felt undervalued as professionals during the district's salary bargaining and negotiations about compensation (Reid, 2010). Smith (2010) noted similar sentiments that teachers believed affected their morale. In a meeting with the school board, the Fort Wayne Education Association advocated for their teachers and highlighted several reasons for the teacher morale problem, which included salary negotiations (Smith, 2010). Another study revealed that a significant percentage of the teachers (88%) believed that the government should raise teacher salaries (Mackenzie, 2007). Although, it is evident in the literature that other factors affect teacher morale, it can be implied that teacher compensation has a significant impact on teacher morale.

Evidence regarding low teacher morale has been linked to lack of recognition. Recent research findings emphasize that teachers were dissatisfied with the amount and type of recognition and respect they received as teachers in the district (Huysman, 2008; Mackenzie, 2007; Reed, 2010). Within the context of recognition and respect, teachers saw mainstream media as an adverse opponent to the teaching profession because teachers were often characterized in the news by negative incidents (Mackenzie, 2007). Andrews (1985) emphasized that schools with high teacher morale were characterized with formal and informal systems of teacher recognition. While recognition previously seemed to be associated with school level issues, researchers have conceded that recognition has multiple levels of influence and proposed that salaries and recognition were intertwined.

A recurring theme has been the importance of the school and district administrators' actions with regard to teacher morale. In a study concerned specifically with teacher morale and school climate, priority was given to the leadership behaviors exhibited by the school principal. The researchers highlighted leadership behaviors as a significant determinant of teacher morale. Miller (1981) conceded that teachers were more productive when they were provided opportunities to participate in the decision making process. Teacher praise, instructional leadership, technical leadership, and supporting professional growth were all practices that impacted teacher morale. The results of a mixed method study conducted by Mackenzie indicated that 97% of the respondents identified leadership as a major stimulus for high teacher morale (Huysman, 2008; Lumsden, 1998; Mackenzie, 2007; Miller, 1981).

Another relationship that has been advanced by researchers is the link between school culture and teacher morale. Miller (1981) maintained that student learning and teacher morale were related to a positive school culture that was characterized by respect, shared decision making, communication, and administrative support. As noted in the study conducted by Huysman (2007), teacher morale was low because the school culture was embedded with inequities that emanated from the distribution of power. Moreover, the teachers in this study outlined lack of recognition, company policies,

advancement, co-worker relations, and salaries as factors that caused an unproductive school culture. Mackenzie (2007) corroborated these findings in a study on teacher morale in Australia. Several recommendations were offered to improve the school culture. Of those recommendations, teacher workload, preparation time, administrative support, recognition, and opportunities for advancement were found to offer could give administrators leverage to enhance or change the school culture.

Several assumptions can be deduced from the research on teacher morale. First, teacher morale can be critical to school success. Secondly, the factors that cause low levels of morale appear to stem from extrinsic sources that are controlled by the administrators and in some cases the media. Teachers may lose motivation because they feel decisions and policies are inequitable based on some arbitrary criteria. Inequitable treatment and lack of recognition could be stimulated by salary negotiations among bargaining parties as well. Low salary ranges may be seen as a lack of respect for the profession and inequitable when compared to the salaries of administrators. While school culture and climate are correlated with administrative practices, the macro environment in which they work can be a strong determinant of what takes place on the school level. Lastly, factors that affect teacher morale seem to be similar in nature, but there could be a difference in which factors hold more weight based on the number of years in the profession and the politics of the district.

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