Faculty trust in the principal: an essential ingredient in high-performing schools

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationships among faculty trust in the principal, principal leadership behaviors, school climate, and student achievement.

Design/methodology/approach – Data from 64 elementary, middle, and high schools in two school districts formed the basis of the study (n = 3,215 teachers), allowing for correlational and regression analyses of the variables.

Findings – The authors found that faculty trust in the principal was related to perceptions of both collegial and instructional leadership, as well as to factors of school climate such as teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement. Student achievement was also correlated with trust, principal leadership behaviors, and school climate. The authors found that both of the composite variables, principal behaviors and school climate, made significant independent contributions to explaining variance in student achievement and that together they explained 75 percent of the variance in achievement.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations of the study include the use of a single form to collect participants’ responses that may have elevated the degree of correlations, as well as the exclusion of rural schools from the sample.

Practical implications – The findings of this study suggest that principals must foster and maintain trust in order to lead schools effectively. Importantly, trust has both interpersonal and task-oriented dimensions. Thus, principals must be prepared to engage collegially with teachers in ways that are consistently honest, open, and benevolent, while also dependably demonstrating sound knowledge and competent decision making associated with administering academic programs.

Originality/value – Situated in a conceptual framework of systems theory, this study explored the interplay of faculty trust in the principal, principal behavior, school climate, and student achievement. The findings suggest that it is necessary for principals to evidence both interpersonal and task-oriented behaviors in order to be trusted by teachers. Furthermore, the strength of the relationships suggests that schools will not be successful in fostering student learning without trustworthy school leaders who are skillful in cultivating academic press, teacher professionalism, and community engagement in their schools.

Keywords Principals, Organizational culture, Educational administration, Trust, Administrators, Instructional leadership, Faculty trust, Student achievement, School climate, Collegial leadership, Principal leadership

Paper type Research paper

For more than 30 years, public education in the USA has been in a near constant state of critique and reform. The publication of the federal report A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), 1983) in 1983 is widely viewed as the historical milestone at which time the present accountability era began. Other milestones that further characterize the past three decades have followed in succession, such as the publication of curriculum standards by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Commission on Teaching Standards for School Mathematics (1991), the articulation of Goals 2000 as federal policy in 1993 (United States Department of...
Education (USDOE), 1993), the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), and, most recently, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors’ Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Taken together, these five historical markers signify the advent of and continuing momentum toward national standards for curriculum, assessment, and accountability. But the USA is not alone in this drive for educational accountability. While other countries have long had national curricula or have long histories of using standardized assessments for high-stakes decisions for students, ongoing, and worldwide attention has been given to reports that compare the educational achievement of students, such as TIMSS (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) and PISA (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2010). The sense of competitiveness and of external accountability has reached such intensity that these international comparisons have been described as “league tables,” a pointed allusion to the competition of professional sports (Hawker, 2013).

The historical markers noted above also suggest a common approach taken toward educational reform, namely, that if we are clearer about our expectations for student learning (as expressed in explicit curriculum standards), if we rigorously assess students’ achievement relative to these expectations (such as with technology-enhanced assessments), and if we hold educators in schools accountable for the results, then the educational systems of states (and, collectively, of the nation) will improve. This chain of reasoning is indicative of an understanding of the educational process as a complicated system, when, in fact, the process of teaching and learning in schools is a complex system.

By way of explanation, a simple system is one that will predictably bring about expected results given that one has attained a given level of experience and proficiency in a requisite set of knowledge and skills. An example of a simple system is the process of cooking using a recipe. A complicated system is one in which a number of component parts must work in tandem to bring about the expected result, and which requires a high level of expertise and the application of tested formulae to undertake certain operational processes of the system. Such expertise increases the likelihood of bringing about the intended outcome, although not with absolute assurance. Examples of complicated systems include the internal mechanisms of a clock or sending an unmanned rocket into space. A complex system oftentimes incorporates both simple and complicated subsystems, but the realization of intended outcomes is less predictable. This is because complex systems include unpredictable and sometimes unknown variables. Furthermore, complex systems are also characterized by the phenomenon of reciprocal causation, whereby the acted upon also serves as an actor within the processes of the system, thus being both affected by and affecting other processes within the system as well as the outcomes of the process. Examples include farming, policy making, and, of course, education (Senge, 1990).

Education is complex. It cannot be reduced to an easy formulae such as higher standards + rigorous assessment + accountability = higher achievement. An inordinate number of variables are at play in the teaching and learning process, especially in organizations such as contemporary public schools. One such set of variables are the many and varied interpersonal relationships that develop, ebb, and flow among the myriad members of a school community, namely, students, parents, teachers, and principals. As individuals and groups, students, parents, teachers, and principals work simultaneously with and for each other. As with any complex system, members in the system are both actors and acted upon by the system.
Stated differently, individuals and groups within schools are dependent in large part upon others within the school and school system. Such interdependence necessarily means that trust must be present to some degree in order to facilitate the constant, innumerable interactions that occur among people in a school. Trust can be defined as a willingness to make oneself vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something that you care about will not be harmed (Tschannen-Moran, 2014a). Past research in a variety of contexts has shown that educators make these judgments based on the confidence that their colleagues and clients are benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent (Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999, 2003). The collective trust between the various interdependent actors in a school has been shown to be a significant variable in facilitating the achievement of educational outcomes for students (Tschannen-Moran, 2014b; Zeinabadi, 2014). When principals, teachers, students, and parents trust each other and work cooperatively, a climate of success is more likely. They are better positioned to accomplish the essential educational goals of fostering student achievement and equipping students for citizenship. School leaders who create bonds of trust can help inspire teachers to move to higher levels of effort and achievement and can better work together in the service of solving the challenging problems of schooling (Chughtai and Buckley, 2009; Forsyth and Adams, 2014; Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Notman and Henry, 2011; Salfi, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2003, 2009; Zeinabadi, 2014). In contrast, when teachers and principals do not trust one another, each seeks to minimize their vulnerability and risk by adopting self-protective stances. The result can be disengagement from the educational process that comes at the expense of student learning (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2014b).

Attentive to the broad-based and decades-long call for improved learning outcomes for students and recognizing the inherent complexity of education as a system, our study sought to further illuminate the role of trust in relationship to principal leadership behaviors, school climate, and student achievement. Our hope is to shine new light on the complex system of education and to provide a better understanding of trust as one of its essential dynamics.

Literature review
Teachers and principals share responsibility for creating and providing a context for and experiences that will lead to student learning. Of course, teachers in a school hold particular responsibility for instruction while the principal is responsible for stewardship of the school’s vision, engaging all members of the school community, managing the organization, ensuring the effectiveness of the faculty, and doing so with integrity and fairness (Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2008). As such, principals are critically positioned to leverage both instructional and collegial factors in schools.

1. Faculty trust in the principal
Principals work with, for, and through teachers as they lead schools and in order to accomplish shared educational objectives. Whether they are facilitating committee meetings, addressing the membership of Parent-Teacher Association, or chatting with students in the hallway during class changes, principals are under continuous scrutiny. For teachers, their observations of and interactions with their principal form the basis for discernment as to whether or not they are going to extend trust to their principal.
The impression of the principal’s benevolence, honesty, openness, competence, and consistency all contribute potently to the trust that the faculty place in the principal (Handford and Leithwood, 2013). Factor analytic studies across a variety of settings has demonstrated that each of these five facets contribute to judgments of trust in schools (Hoy and Tschanne-Moran, 1999, 2003).

First and foremost, for principals to earn the trust of their teachers, they must demonstrate genuine caring for teachers, students, and parents alike. Benevolence is characterized by a generalized spirit of good will and a willingness to extend oneself in support of the well-being of the other. It may also entail a willingness to forego personal gain if it would bring potential harm to the trusting party (Tschanne-Moran, 2014a).

To be trusted, principals must also be honest in their interactions with teachers (Tschanne-Moran and Hoy, 1998). Honesty refers not only to the conventional sense of telling the truth, but it also includes a sense of integrity. Teachers who trust the principal believe in the principal’s sense of fairness and do not harbor concerns that a principal might play favorites among the faculty. Additionally, the perception of honesty in a trusting relationship also means that principals must be authentic in their behaviors (Bird et al., 2012, 2009; Hoy and Henderson, 1983; Hoy and Kupersmith, 1985). Authenticity has to do with a willingness to be oneself - to truthfully represent one’s beliefs and feelings, as well as owning up to one’s foibles. Principals who come across as too guarded can be suspected of hiding something, either about themselves or concerning their attitudes toward others, thus making teachers less willing to put themselves in a position of vulnerability to the principal.

Principals also garner the trust of their faculty by being open in both information and control. Trusting principals invite faculty involvement in decision making, thereby fostering a sense of being valued by their teachers. When teachers not only have involvement but also influence over organizational decisions that affect them, the conditions necessary to foster mutual trust between teachers and principals becomes manifest (Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2011; Tschanne-Moran, 2001). This is the case particularly when the professional expertise of teachers is fundamental to the issue at hand, such as decisions related to instruction or a commitment to student learning and well-being (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschanne-Moran, 2014a, b). Teachers who trust their principal are, in turn, more likely to communicate accurately and completely about problems and are more inclined toward engaging in problem solving (Zand, 1997). Candor in a trusting relationship can allow for more effective problem solving and can provide an additional bulwark to an organization when confronting change or turbulence (Daly, 2009; Hoy and Sweetland, 2001; Mishra, 1996; Tschanne-Moran, 2009, 2014a, b; Tschanne-Moran and Hoy, 2000). Indeed, high levels of trust between subordinates and leaders is associated with greater confidence in the accuracy of information coming from the leader, a greater desire to interact with the leader, and greater satisfaction in communication with the leader, overall (Roberts and O’Reilly, 1974).

Faculty trust in the principal also relies heavily on the competence of principals in their role as school leaders (Handford and Leithwood, 2013). Principals are responsible for fostering a compelling vision for the school, modeling desired behaviors of professional educators, coaching faculty to align their skills to pursue the school vision, managing organizational resources effectively and fairly, and mediating the inevitable conflicts that emerge as educators engage in the complex work of schooling (Tschanne-Moran, 2014a). Teachers depend upon the principal to manage these complex roles successfully in order to fulfill the similarly complex responsibilities they
have in teaching young people. Principals must balance the task dimension of their role with the relationship dimension of leadership (Tschannen-Moran, 2014a). Taking a too-narrow task orientation can result in ineffectual relationships, while focusing too much on interrelationships without effectively meeting core responsibilities can subvert teacher trust. Therefore, trustworthy principals adopt knowledge, skills, work habits, and systems that enable them to achieve the myriad tasks necessary to operate and lead a school (Adams and Forsyth, 2007; Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Hoy and Sweetland, 2001). When principals demonstrate the ability to get the job done, whatever that job may entail, teachers are more inclined to trust in the principal.

Finally, faculty trust in the principal is dependent upon the consistency with which the principal exhibits qualities of benevolence, honesty, openness, and competence. As has often been noted, the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Thus, principals who reliably act in ways that elicit trust across time and settings are more likely to earn and maintain the trust of their faculty than those who do not (Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014a). Teachers want to be able to depend upon the actions of their principal, including the trust that decisions will be followed through on and that promises will be kept.

Together, these five facets of trust form the basis for positive and productive working relationships between principals and teachers. We predict that they will be related to both collegial and instructional leadership behaviors as well as to three salient aspects of school climate, including teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement. These we discuss below.

2. **Principal leadership behaviors**

As we have noted, schools are complex organizations. Thus, organizational leadership theory provides an important conceptual frame to our exploration of faculty trust in principals. Here we consider two leadership foci, one oriented toward interpersonal relationships (i.e. collegiality) and the other oriented toward the central task of schools, namely, instruction. Conceptually, collegial leadership and instructional leadership are not mutually exclusive, nor are we suggesting that they are the only two relevant leadership orientations. Considered together, however, they provide a framework of leadership behaviors that may be associated with faculty trust in principals.

**Collegial leadership.** Principals who exhibit collegial leadership are perceived by their faculty to be supportive and egalitarian. They are considerate, helpful, and genuinely concerned about the welfare of teachers. The interpersonal manner of such principals is typically friendly and approachable. They accept questions from teachers and are open to exploring all sides of an issue. They admit that divergent opinions exist, and they seek to garner and put into play suggestions from the faculty (Hoy et al., 1998). Collegial leadership presumes that a group of individuals hold not only common goals in mind but also have shared ideas about how to work together in pursuit of those goals. This kind of professional orientation is in contrast to a command-and-control approach to leadership, which posits the principal as the top-of-the-chart authority on all decisions giving only a marginal role to teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Collegial leaders tend to be less rigid in their approach to leadership and are not perceived to be overly directive or restrictive. Collegial leadership encourages teachers to make adaptive judgments that temper or even substitute for existing rules and procedures (Hoy and Sweetland, 2000, 2001). Openness as a facet of trust is conceptually related to a principal’s collegial leadership style, in which the principal is perceived to be
approachable and open to the ideas of others (Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 1998).

Although collegial leadership may sound as though it is merely a feel-good philosophy intended to build esprit de corps, it has, in fact, been associated with increased motivation and commitment to shared goals as well as improved school performance (Cloke and Goldsmith, 2002). This happens as leaders decentralize decision making when it is expeditious to do so and harness the collective wisdom of teachers when needed. Collegial principals recognize that their teachers possess valuable professional knowledge and tend to put in place enabling structures that allow them to tap teacher expertise in decision making (Forsyth and Adams, 2014; Hoy and Sweetland, 2000, 2001).

Research in various contexts has found relationships between leadership behaviors similar to collegial leadership to be related to faculty trust in the principal. For example, the level of perceived administrative support was found to be related to teachers’ trust in the principal as well as the overall trust in the organization (Tasdan and Yalcin, 2010). In addition, the degree to which teachers felt empowered in their work environments, and who reported significant autonomy and substantial influence in their work environments were found to have higher trust in their principals (Moye et al., 2005). Finally, principals who adopted an enabling stance toward the degree of formalization and centralization were found to engender greater trust from their teachers, and these dynamics together predicted greater instructional capacity among a school’s faculty as well as greater achievement in both reading and mathematics among the school’s students (Forsyth and Adams, 2014). Thus, our first hypothesis concerns the relationship between collegial leadership and trust:

**H1.** Faculty trust in the principal will be significantly and positively related to collegial leadership behaviors.

*Instructional leadership.* Whereas collegial leadership focusses on the nature of the interrelationship and orientation to action among teachers and the principal in a school, instructional leadership focusses on the core tasks of schooling, namely: choosing appropriate curriculum, improving instruction, managing school context, and improving student learning (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 1999). As instructional leaders, principals are tasked with influencing student performance by shaping the school’s learning-focused mission and aligning the school’s structures and culture to serve the mission (Hallinger, 2005). However, instructional leadership is not restricted to the principals’ manipulations of organizational variables. Principals’ instructional leadership involves impacting practices both through faculty-wide efforts and through individualized efforts, each of which represent important means to improve instruction and, therefore, student performance (May and Supovitz, 2011).

While instruction is clearly the focus of instructional leadership, the primary instructors are, obviously, teachers. Thus, the principal as instructional leader must engage with teachers regularly, effectively, and with clear intent in order to exact change in their instructional practices (Coldren and Spillane, 2007; Marks and Printy, 2003; Robinson et al., 2008). As such, instructional leadership can take the form of teacher professional development, curriculum development, and teacher supervision (Blase and Blase, 1998; Handford and Leithwood, 2013). Other manifestations of instructional leadership include the use of data in discussions about practice,
monitoring teachers’ lesson plans, and focusing a school community on its collective responsibility for educational excellence through partnerships and community development (Coldren and Spillane, 2007).

The clear intent of instructional leadership is to improve student learning outcomes by strengthening teachers’ instructional practices (Brown et al., 2004; Finnigan, 2010; Heck and Moriyama, 2010; May and Supovitz, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). As might be expected, research has borne out that the effect of instructional leadership on student achievement may be indirect, but it is nonetheless significant, most notably in terms of the performance of teachers vis-à-vis instruction (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Hallinger et al., 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004, 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Supovitz et al., 2010). Also of note, in light of the previous explanation of collegial leadership, a large-scale study of principals’ instructional leadership was found to impact school performance more by strengthening teachers’ professional community than by directly influencing their instructional practices (Louis et al., 2010). A school-wide culture of trust, and especially trust in the principal, has been found to be an important precondition for the development of professional learning communities (Cranston, 2011; Wahlstrom and Louis, 2008). Teachers are more likely to be open to a principal who is trusted, whereas a teacher who does not trust the principal is more likely to engage in self-protective behaviors that may impair the sense of professional community in a school (Tschannen-Moran, 2014b). This leads to our second hypothesis, concerning the relationship between trust in the principal and instructional leadership behaviors:

\[ H2. \] Faculty trust in the principal will be significantly and positively related to instructional leadership behaviors.

3. School climate

Schools are communities of service providers. As service communities, the interrelationships that develop and persist among members within those communities are important to the effective functioning of the organization. School climate is a construct that attempts to capture the perceptions of members of a school community regarding the quality of interpersonal relationships. Specifically, school climate as a construct is comprised of impressions of accepted norms of behavior as related to teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement.

Teacher professionalism. A profession is characterized by members who possess specialized expert knowledge and who pledge their first and primary responsibility to the welfare of those they serve as opposed to primary loyalty to the organization. Such professionalism is supported by education and socialization processes which demand that entrants to the profession demonstrate that they possess knowledge of the principles, theories, and procedures that undergird appropriate decision making and that they continually seek to enhance that knowledge through professional development. Teacher professionalism is characterized as a collective focus on student learning. As teachers are socialized into the norms of the profession of education, their beliefs, attitudes, and actions are expected to evidence a strong sense of accountability to the shared mission of service to students and their families (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Sykes, 1999). That shared sense of purpose enlivens the professional work of teachers, but it does not rely primarily on a chain of command to enforce the investment of effort required for success; instead, it relies more upon the commitment of teachers as professionals to serve their clients properly (Louis and Kruse, 1995).
Teacher professionalism refers to behavior that shows that teachers are committed to their work and willing to work cooperatively with one another (Hoy et al., 1998). In schools with a high degree of teacher professionalism, teachers are clearly committed to their students and engaged in the teaching process. They take their work seriously and go beyond minimum expectations in order to meet the unique, individual needs of students. They also respect the competence and expertise of their colleagues. These teachers typically display warmth and friendliness as they work with students and other members of the school community. They are enthusiastic about their work.

A hallmark of professional practice is the ability to apply professional judgment in non-routine circumstances, taking relevant considerations into account. Because of the complexity of the decisions to be made by teachers, the quality of those decisions is enhanced by collective deliberation. Professionalism in schools is evidenced through productive collaboration, de-privatized teaching practice, and reflective dialogue (Louis et al., 1996). Professional teachers continually research best practices to serve their students better, engaging in joint deliberation as they pursue data to bolster their decision making in order to better meet the needs of individual students (Elmore et al., 1996; Fullan, 2003). Professional standards of practice do not translate into the uniform treatment of all students, however. Rather, they make possible the adaptation of instructional strategies based on informed assessments and professional judgments (Darling-Hammond, 1988). It is not a surprise, then, that teacher professionalism has been found to be positively correlated with student achievement (Hoy et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006).

School leaders play a significant role in establishing the norms and structures that support teacher professionalism. Principals with a professional orientation structure work processes and cultivate norms that enable teachers to be productively engaged in collective inquiry and to contribute constructively to student needs (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Their leadership orientation impacts the quality and vitality of the entire professional community in a school as evidenced by supportive administrative practices, high-quality interpersonal relationships, and adaptive implementation of school policies (Forsyth and Adams, 2014; Zeinabadi, 2014). Structural elements such as the arrangement of time to allow for collaborative planning as well as structures for shared decision making have also been found to influence the level of professional community (Louis and Kruse, 1995; Louis et al., 1996). Finally, the degree to which a principal practices shared leadership and is trusted by teachers have been found to be related to the instructional practices of teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Wahlstrom and Louis, 2008). This leads to our third hypothesis regarding the relationship of trust and professionalism:

**H3.** Faculty trust in the principal will be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of the professionalism of their colleagues.

**Academic press.** Schools with high academic press are focussed strongly on academics and a quest for excellence (Hoy and Hannum, 1997; Hoy et al., 1998). In these schools, teachers share a sense of confidence in students’ abilities and the belief that all students can reach high academic standards. Stemming from these beliefs, educators create learning environments that are orderly and serious, with high goals and expectations. Students who do well academically are publicly recognized and honored. In return, students respect the academic norms of the school, look up to peers who are successful
academically, and work hard to meet the high expectations that have been set for them (Hoy and Feldman, 1987; Hoy et al., 1998).

A rich body of empirical research has established a relationship between teachers’ perceptions of academic press and student achievement, even when controlling for socioeconomic status (SES) (Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy, 2005; Bryk et al., 1993; Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy and Hannum, 1997; Hoy and Tarter, 1997; Hoy et al., 1990, 1991, 1998, 2006; Lee and Bryk, 1989; Lee and Smith, 1999; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2006). In the past decade, studies have emerged that point to academic press as one of a trio of closely related constructs, along with collective teacher efficacy and teacher trust in students and parents, as being among the few variables examined by educational researchers that is associated consistently with student achievement above and beyond the effects of SES (Hoy et al., 2006, 2008; Smith and Hoy, 2007).

Academic press historically has been measured only by assessing teacher perceptions of school climate. There is, however, an emerging body of knowledge also linking students’ perceptions of academic press to achievement (Ferguson, 2010; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013). Adams (2010) went further in examining academic emphasis among families, noting that when an emphasis on academics was in place at home, students were socialized to trust teachers and to work hard in school. This, in turn, contributed to greater student achievement and success. In a Norwegian context, the level of academic press in a school was related not only to the faculty trust in the principal but also to positive attitudes within the school (Christophersen et al., 2011). Together these findings point to the strong role that the element of school climate can play in influencing productive behaviors among members of the school community. We hope to build on this small but intriguing evidence base by exploring our fourth hypothesis, surround the relationship between faculty trust and academic press:

**H4.** Faculty trust in the principal will be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of academic press.

**School community engagement.** Community engagement has to do with the extent to which a school has fostered a constructive relationship within its surrounding community. Wise school leaders recognize the reciprocal influences between the school and the home as well as the importance of these relationships to high-functioning schools. Schools with strong community engagement can count on the involvement and support of parents and community members; they are thus open to inviting parents and community members to participate in planning and decision making at the school. Where community engagement is high, schools provide stakeholders with information about their goals and accomplishments. The school is responsive to the needs and concerns of parents and community members and, as a result, it is better able to marshal community support when needed.

Community engagement that fosters parental support has been found to be influential in fostering student achievement (Epstein, 1988; Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Griffith, 1996). A growing body of research supports the contention that strategies that actively engage parents in the life of the school have positive consequences for the school. In one study, fostering parental support was found to be second only to classroom management in relation to improved student learning (Wang et al., 1993). Although high parent involvement is often associated with higher income communities, it has been found to be significantly related to student achievement for families across a
variety of economic, racial/ethnic, and educational backgrounds and for students of all ages, even when other factors such as leadership, instruction, expectation, order, and collaboration were included in the analysis (Bulach et al., 1995; Epstein, 1988; Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Griffith, 1996; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Wang et al., 1993). High parent involvement may, however, be of particular value in addressing the needs of low-income students (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). Among the strategies that top performing, high-poverty schools use to improve student achievement is a focus on efforts to involve parents in helping students meet educational standards. One study found that most of the high-performing, low-SES schools in their sample had developed early support systems that fostered parental involvement through campaigns related to curricular activities and remediation interventions in addition to comprehensive systems of monitoring student data (Barth, 1990). These strategies include involving family members in the development of workshops, providing tutoring, and assisting teachers in classrooms or with after school activities. Community engagement is not only associated with improved student performance, but also with better student attendance, as well as decreased student dropout and delinquency rates. Thus, our fifth hypothesis explores the degree to which faculty trust in the principal is related to community engagement in a school:

H5. Faculty trust in the principal will be significantly and positively related to faculty perceptions of community engagement.

4. Student achievement
Student learning is clearly the business of schools; however, learning is a complex phenomenon and not easily reduced to simple or accurate measures. Because of the nature of learning, there are inherent challenges to assessing it in ways that are wholly valid or completely reliable. Assessment instruments are typically designed to measure samples of larger sets of intended learning outcomes for students. Such intended learning outcomes are anchored in academic or related disciplines and tend to reside in the cognitive domain of human behavior, although they might consist of psychomotor and affective behaviors, to some extent, as well. What’s more, intended learning outcomes in school settings are oftentimes comprised of complex sets of content and skills, such as algebraic concepts and procedures, historical facts and analyses, or scientific knowledge and methods of investigation. Reducing complex sets of knowledge and skills to objective measures is the perennial challenge of assessment (Gareis and Grant, 2008).

Given the inherent limits of assessment, the selection of a proxy for student learning can be challenging and, frankly, not always satisfying. Most typically, student learning is evaluated based upon student achievement, as indicated by a score on a standardized test related to a given set of knowledge or skills. Choosing to use a standardized test as a measure of student achievement has certain advantages. Such tests typically have defensible evidence of their validity and reliability. Additionally, such assessments are oftentimes used for high-stakes decision making (e.g. grade promotion or graduation rates) and therefore are deemed of significant educational importance for students and school personnel alike. With standardized test scores, it is possible to compare student performance at the individual, classroom, school, and district levels, as well as to test complex models that seek to explain student performance. On the other hand, standardized assessments tend to sample a narrower range of intended learning
outcomes and may reduce complex and important learning aims to lower levels of cognitive behavior and simplified conceptualizations (Gareis and Grant, 2008).

Measuring student-learning outcomes is an example of available methodology that is lagging behind the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and, therefore, that is not receiving adequate empirical investigation. For the purposes of the following study, student achievement on standardized tests aggregated to the school will be the primary measure of student-learning outcomes, although we recognize the limitations described above.

A small body of literature links faculty trust in the principal to student achievement in either direct or indirect ways (Chughtai and Buckley, 2009; Forsyth and Adams, 2014; Handford and Leithwood, 2013; Notman and Henry, 2011; Salfi, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2014b; Zeinabadi, 2014). We hope to add to that evidence base with our sixth hypothesis concerning the relationship between faculty trust in the principal and student achievement:

\[ H6. \] Faculty trust in the principal will be significantly and positively related to student achievement.

5. Summary
In sum, we believe that there is a link between faculty trust in the principal and the behaviors that a principal evidences in his or her practice. Whether collegial leadership or instructional leadership will have the greater impact, we are uncertain, but both seem to be important in terms of principal actions that lead to trust. We also believe that faculty trust in the principal will be related to aspects of school climate, whether in relation to the norms that guide teacher professional behavior, the seriousness with which academics are held among the faculty and students, or in the ways that the school engages with parents and the surrounding community. Previous research has linked faculty trust in the principal and the health and openness of the school climate (Hoffman et al., 1994; Hoy et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2001; Tarter and Hoy, 1988; Tarter et al., 1989, 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). In this study, we hope to build upon that work with a fresh examination of principal leadership behaviors and of school climate. This leads us to our seventh and final hypothesis:

\[ H7. \] A substantial proportion of the variance in student achievement will be explained by a composite of principal behaviors and a composite of school climate variables.

Method
The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between faculty trust in the principal and other important aspects of school climate, including two aspects of principal leadership behavior, as well as teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement.

1. Participants
Data from 64 elementary, middle, and high schools in two school districts, one urban and the other suburban, formed the basis of this study. The urban district included 35 elementary schools, nine middle schools, and five high schools, while the suburban district consisted of nine elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. The urban district serves a student population of approximately 34,000 that
are economically and ethnically diverse, with 60 percent of students considered economically disadvantaged and approximately 64 percent African-American, 24 percent white, and 4 percent Hispanic. The suburban district serves approximately 10,500 students, of which 25 percent are considered economically disadvantaged and approximately 70 percent report as white, 19 percent as African-American, and 8 percent as Hispanic.

Participants included 3,215 teachers (2,581 from the urban schools, and 634 from the suburban schools) within the 64 schools. The number of teachers responding per school ranged from 19 to 127, with a mean of 48. All schools levels were well represented among the participants in the faculty surveys (see Table I).

2. Data sources
The surveys were distributed in the spring of the 2010-2011 academic year and were anonymous. In the urban school district, paper surveys were distributed during a faculty meeting on scannable forms. In the suburban district, the surveys were administered electronically. Every teacher was sent the link to the survey and was invited to complete the survey on their own time. While virtually every teacher in the urban district present at the faculty meeting completed a useable survey, the response rates for the electronic survey among the 15 suburban schools had an average response rate of 76 percent (with a range from 48 to 100 percent). Since the school was the unit of analysis, the data were aggregated to the school level.

Faculty trust in the principal. This study assessed faculty trust in the principal using a subscale of the Faculty Trust Scales (FTS) (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The Faculty Trust in the Principal subscale consisted of eight items that tapped teacher perceptions of the principal’s benevolence, honesty, openness, competence, and reliability. The response set was a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Three of the items were negatively worded and consequently were reverse coded. The \( \alpha \) coefficient of reliability for this subscale was 0.98.

Collegial leadership. Faculty perceptions of the collegial leadership of the principal were assessed using a seven-item measure that was a subscale of the Organizational Climate Index (Hoy et al., 1998). The scale used a five-point response scale with anchors at never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and very frequently (5). The \( \alpha \) coefficient of reliability for this subscale was 0.98.

Instructional leadership. The perceptions of teachers regarding the instructional leadership of their principal were assessed using a six-item measure with a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). These items were designed by leaders in the urban school district in this study to tap the perceptions of teachers regarding the instructional leadership of the school. The same scale was then

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Faculty participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary schools</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle schools</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Participants by school level and context
used in the suburban sample. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted. One strong factor emerged with factor loadings ranging from 0.75 to 0.89. The Cronbach’s $\alpha$-reliability score for the six items measuring instructional leadership was 0.92.

**Teacher professionalism.** Teachers’ perceptions of the behavior of their colleagues were assessed using the Teacher Professionalism subscale of the Organizational Climate Index (Hoy et al., 1998). The scale consisted of eight items using a five-point response set asking respondents to rate how frequently the statement is true of his or her school, with anchors at never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and very frequently (5). The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ coefficient of reliability for Teacher Professionalism was 0.94.

**Academic press.** The measure for academic press used was a subscale of the Organizational Climate Index (Hoy et al., 1998). It was comprised of six items that asked teachers to assess the degree to which they perceived that the learning environment was orderly and serious, that students respected others who got good grades, and that academic achievement was recognized and acknowledged by the school. Responses were captured on a five-point Likert subscale with anchors at never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and very frequently (5). The Cronbach’s $\alpha$-reliability scores was 0.83. It may be that the internal consistency for this measure was somewhat lower than the other scales because it assessed both student attitudes and adult behaviors.

**Community engagement.** The community engagement subscale of the School Climate Index was developed to tap schools’ positive relationships with their communities. The community engagement factor emphasizes the need for schools to forge an active and productive working relationship with their communities. Each of the eight items required respondents to assess how frequently the statement is true of his or her school on a five-point scale, with anchors at never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and very frequently (5). The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ coefficient of reliability for this subscale was 0.93.

**Student achievement.** The measure of student achievement was the state-mandated standardized tests for mathematics and English language arts. These are criterion-referenced achievement tests used in the state for more than a decade as the means for evaluating student achievement and school performance. Student performance is scored on a scale of 0-600, standardized by grade with 400 representing the minimum level of acceptable proficiency and 500 representing advanced proficiency. Because math and reading scores were highly correlated, as were the scores across grade levels, we combined student scaled scores to produce a grand mean score of academic achievement for each school. For elementary schools in the sample, scores on reading and math assessments for grades 3, 4, and 5 were aggregated into a school score. For middle schools, scores for grades 6, 7, and 8 on assessments in English and math were aggregated. For high schools, end-of-course tests for Algebra I and English 11 were combined. We reasoned that this method would produce a more accurate and stable measure of achievement school wide than either the reading or math scores for any particular grade level alone.

3. Data analysis
To begin, descriptive statistics were calculated for the six climate variables as well as for the measure of student achievement to ensure that there was sufficient variability to proceed. Next, correlational analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationships between leadership and the school climate variables as well as between these variables and student achievement. Next, in order to conduct a multiple
regression, the three variables pertaining to the principal were combined into a composite variable, and the three school climate variables were combined in a second composite variable. This was done to avoid problems with multicollinearity due to the strong correlations between these sets of variables. Finally, to further investigate the results of the multiple regression, bivariate correlations were conducted between the two composite variables and student achievement.

**Results**

1. **Descriptives**

In general, there was sufficient variability among each of the trust and school climate variables to establish them as distinct variables. Interestingly, the scale with the smallest level of variability was teacher professionalism, with a standard deviation of just 0.27. This scale also had the highest mean score of the five measures that used a five-point scale, indicating that teachers, by and large, held their colleagues in high regard concerning their commitment to students and competence in their roles (see Table II). Student achievement also demonstrated sufficient variability between schools for the analysis to proceed.

2. **Trust and leadership behaviors**

We first sought to understand the degree to which faculty trust in the principal was related to other measures of principal behavior, specifically the extent to which the principal adopted a collegial leadership style as well as the extent to which the principal was engaged with the instructional program of the school. It was not a surprise that trust in the principal was related to principal behavior, but it was surprising to see just how strongly their behaviors influenced faculty trust in them. We found that the collegial leadership behaviors of the principal were strongly related to faculty trust in the principal \( (r = 0.92, p < 0.01) \). Furthermore, the instructional leadership behaviors of the principal were also very strongly related to the level of faculty trust in the principal \( (r = 0.91, p < 0.01) \) (see Table III). We wondered if these strong results might be accentuated because of differences between elementary and secondary schools, but we found no significant differences in the relationships between elementary schools and secondary schools for faculty trust in the principal, collegial leadership, and instructional leadership.

3. **Trust and climate**

Next, we explored the degree that faculty trust in the principal would be related to indicators of school climate *vis-à-vis* the behavior and attitudes of other members of the school community. We found that teacher trust in the principal was strongly related

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Response set</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher trust in principal</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial leadership</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher professionalism</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic press</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>420.78, 529.60</td>
<td>471.87</td>
<td>26.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Descriptives
### Table III.
Correlational analysis of teacher trust in principal, school climate, and student achievement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Collegial leadership</th>
<th>Instructional leadership</th>
<th>Teacher professionalism</th>
<th>Academic press</th>
<th>Community engagement</th>
<th>Student achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher trust in principal</td>
<td>0.924**</td>
<td>0.911**</td>
<td>0.711**</td>
<td>0.543**</td>
<td>0.611**</td>
<td>0.427**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collegial leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.856**</td>
<td>0.568**</td>
<td>0.437**</td>
<td>0.502**</td>
<td>0.248*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.751**</td>
<td>0.633**</td>
<td>0.651**</td>
<td>0.468**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher professionalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.858**</td>
<td>0.751**</td>
<td>0.704**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic press</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.784**</td>
<td>0.802**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** $n = 64$. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels, respectively (two-tailed).**
to teacher professionalism \( (r = 0.71, p < 0.01) \), explaining 49 percent of the variance in professionalism. Trust in the principal was not quite as strongly related to the perceptions of academic press \( (r = 0.54, p < 0.01) \) and community engagement \( (r = 0.61, p < 0.01) \), but these were still substantive effects, explaining between 29 and 37 percent of the variance in these variables (see Table III).

4. Leadership, climate, and achievement
In our next set of analyses, we explored the relationship between aspects of leadership and student achievement, as well as between school climate and achievement. The data revealed that teacher trust in the principal was related to student achievement at a moderate level \( (r = 0.43, p < 0.01) \). This was similar to the relationships of instructional leadership and achievement \( (r = 0.47, p < 0.01) \), and both were stronger than the relationship between collegial leadership and achievement \( (r = 0.25, p < 0.01) \). With regard to school climate and achievement, teacher professionalism was strongly related to achievement \( (r = 0.70, p < 0.01) \). Moreover, both academic press \( (r = 0.80, p < 0.01) \) and community engagement \( (r = 0.81, p < 0.01) \) were strongly related to student achievement (see Table III).

The strong relationships we discovered led us to follow up with a multiple regression. To avoid problems of multicollinearity, we combined the three principal constructs into a single variable, and we likewise combined the three school climate variables into a single composite variable. We found that both of these composite variables made a significant independent contribution to explaining variance in student achievement and that together they explained 75 percent of the variance in achievement (see Table IV).

While we were pleased that our composite variables had shown themselves to be such strong predictors of student achievement, we were perplexed that the standardized \( \beta \) weight for the principal composite was negative, while the standardized \( \beta \) weight for the school climate composite was greater than one. Upon further exploration of the literature, we discovered that this is a phenomenon that occurs when highly correlated variables are included in the same regression analysis (Deegan, 1978).

To ensure that the negative \( \beta \) weight was not signifying that in composite the principal variables were somehow diminishing student achievement, we ran an additional bivariate correlation between our two composite variables and our measure of student achievement. What we found was consistent with our previous correlational analyses of the individual variables. They were both positively related to student achievement. The composite measure of principal leadership was moderately related to student achievement \( (r = 0.40, p < 0.01) \), while the school climate composite was

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
<th>Adjusted ( R^2 )</th>
<th>SE of the estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal composite (faculty trust of principal and leadership behaviors)</td>
<td>-0.282</td>
<td>-3.294</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.749</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td>13.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate composite (teacher professionalism, academic press, community engagement)</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>11.976</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note**: \( n = 64 \)

*Table IV.* Multiple regression of principal composite and school climate composite on student achievement
strongly related ($r = 0.83, p < 0.01$) (see Table V). By squaring these bivariate correlations, we saw that the principal composite explained 16 percent of the variance in achievement, while the climate composite explained 69 percent. Neither individually explained the 75 percent of the variance that was explained when the two composite variables were combined in the multiple regression. This suggests that principals have both a direct and an indirect relationship to student achievement, through their influence on school climate.

**Discussion**

The question that motivated this study was the extent to which trustworthy leadership was related to the cultivation of both a strong and vibrant school climate as well as high student achievement. The evidence presented here, from over 3,000 teachers nested within 64 schools in both urban and suburban schools, was that such leadership matters a great deal. The strong correlations we found attest to that. First, we were not surprised that the leadership behaviors of the principal contribute to faculty trust in the principal. We posited two competing conceptualizations of principal leadership from the research literature, and we sought to find which aspects of principal behavior would be most salient. In short, we wondered whether it is more important for a principal to be friendly, approachable, and open to input from teachers or for the principal to be aware of and deeply engaged in the instructional program of the school. The answer turned out to be “yes” - both were important in nearly equal measure. Moreover, these two competing conceptualizations were highly correlated, suggesting that the manner in which the principal engages with teachers on matters related to the instructional program is important. Teachers seem to be looking for principals who are approachable and open in their attitudes as they engage with teachers about instruction. These findings are consistent with previous literature that has explored these issues using both qualitative (Cranston, 2011; Handford and Leithwood, 2013) and quantitative methodologies (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tasdan and Yalcin, 2010).

Our findings also pointed to the ways in which principal attitudes and approach are linked to other aspects of school climate. Collegial leadership, instructional leadership, and trustworthy behavior on the part of the principal were all related to teacher professionalism. That is, where teachers felt that they could put their faith in the principal and that their principal was someone to whom they could turn for assistance with instructional matters, teachers perceived their colleagues to be more committed to students and that they were competent, cooperative, and supportive. A correlation also means that the opposite is true. Where teachers did not trust their principals, they were also likely to rate their colleagues less favorably in terms of professional judgment and competence. Predictably, enthusiasm for teaching was also lower when trust in the principal was lower and where the principal was less collegial.

| Table V. Correlation of principal and climate composite variables with student achievement |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Student achievement            | 0.395**                        |
| Principal leadership composite | 0.669**                        |
| School climate composite       | 0.829**                        |

Notes: $n = 64$. **,*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 and 0.05 levels, respectively.
and less engaged. The relationship we found between faculty trust in the principal and teacher professionalism may well be one of the mechanisms at play in instances where an indirect link between trust in the principal and student achievement has been found.

Principal leadership behaviors and trustworthiness were related to the level of academic press in a school, suggesting that a principal who is engaged in the instructional program and whose leadership style is open and egalitarian is more likely to lead a school where academics are taken seriously. It may be that such principals help to create the conditions for a learning environment that is orderly and serious by setting standards of behavior for teachers and students alike and by communicating what is expected of both. It may also be that schools with strong academic press help create the conditions for collegial, engaged, and trustworthy leadership. Moreover, principals who have earned the trust of their faculty and who are engaged in an open manner with the instructional program of the school were related to schools with positive and productive relationships with their community. When these leadership behaviors are evident, the school is likely to have support for its programs when needed and to have community members who are responsive to requests for participation; this could, in turn, mean that the school is more likely to be perceived as being responsive to community members’ concerns and to invite members of the broader community to participate in the work of the school.

It is interesting to note how all of the elements of school climate are intercorrelated with one another. Trustworthy leadership on the part of the principal, for example, is related to teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement; moreover, these aspects of the climate are strongly related to one another. Where teachers conduct themselves with a higher degree of professionalism, there is likely to be greater seriousness and celebration of the academic mission of the school and a deeper level of engagement with the community. Where any one aspect of the school climate begins to suffer, they are all likely to decline as well.

Previous research has sometimes suggested that principal behavior is only indirectly related to student achievement (Hallinger and Heck, 1996). We found a direct interrelationship between principal trustworthiness and leadership behaviors and student achievement. But we also saw evidence of an indirect influence of principal trustworthiness and leadership behaviors on student achievement through elements of school climate.

1. Limitations
All the survey items were administered on the same form, which could potentially lead to response bias so as to elevate the degree of correlations between the variables. In addition, there was inconsistency in the data gathering methods between the participating schools in the urban district and the suburban district. This may have influenced the overall scores for those schools, but perhaps less so the relationships between the variables. Also because of the inconsistency in the data gathering methods between the two settings, we elected not to investigate the possible differences that may be correlated with the SES of school districts. Finally, the measure of student achievement was not uniform across the ten grade levels in which student assessments were used. Because the assessments were standardized to the extent that they all had a passing score of 400 and a pass-advance score of 500, we felt comfortable using a composite measure although we recognized that it was less than ideal. Our decision to create a composite student achievement measure combining math and reading scores
across several grade levels limits the generalizability of our study to schools within the same state that use the same measures of achievement. Likewise, our exclusion of rural schools from our sample limits the degree to which these findings may generalize, even within the state in which the study was conducted.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that without trust, principals cannot be effective leaders. Faculty trust in the principal is related directly to student achievement and it is also related to important elements of school climate that are, in turn, related to student achievement. It is, therefore, unlikely that a school with a principal who is not trusted by the faculty will be successful in fulfilling its core mission of fostering student learning. The implications of these findings are far reaching in terms of the understandings and skills that need to be cultivated in aspiring principals during principal preparation and honed through professional development and coaching once they assume leadership roles.

As we set out to investigate faculty trust in the principal, we posited two approaches to leadership that represented conceptually distinct emphases: collegial leadership and instructional leadership. The former suggests an interpersonal orientation, and the latter suggests a task orientation. While one might intuit that trust would be more strongly correlated with the interpersonal orientation of collegial leadership, we found that faculty trust in the principal was strongly correlated with both collegial leadership and instructional leadership alike. Why might this be? An exploration of the facets of trust may provide some insight.

As described in our earlier explication, trust is a willingness to make oneself vulnerable to another based on a belief in that person’s benevolence, honesty, openness, competence, and reliability. Looking more closely at these facets, there may be conceptual connections between them and both collegial and instructional leadership. Consider, for example, benevolence and openness. Benevolence is when one has someone’s best interest in mind. Also, openness can be manifested in schools as a principal’s interest in and constructive use of faculty input to decision making. In other words, a principal is open to and even inviting of the proactive involvement of teachers as experts in the direction setting and operation of the school. Teacher expertise in the everyday tasks of schools (e.g. instruction, assessment, behavioral intervention, and data disaggregation) is sought by the principal. Thus, benevolence and openness both align with the conceptualization of collegial leadership.

On the other hand, consider the facets of competence and reliability. Competence as a facet of trust is squarely rooted in task-oriented behavior. One extends trust, in part, in the belief that another is knowledgeable about and effective in their professional role. And while reliability is not explicitly tapped in our conceptualization of instructional leadership, it is hard to imagine teachers rating a principal as strong in instructional leadership if he or she is inconsistent or unreliable in the direction setting and stewardship of the instructional program. Thus, both competence and reliability as facets of trust seem in line conceptually to the task orientation of instructional leadership.

We recognize that we are suggesting here a tenuous link, but one that we believe merits attention. To wit, the construct of trust is comprised of five facets (the fifth being honesty), whereas the constructs of collegial and instructional leadership are less finite in definition and more diffuse in how they might manifest in practice. Could it be that
benevolence and openness are two important factors at the core of the interpersonal orientation of collegial leadership? Similarly, could it be that competence and reliability are at the core of the task orientation of instructional leadership? Finally, given that in our analyses we were able to combine collegial, instructional, and trustworthy leadership into a single construct, it may be meaningful to equate leadership behaviors and trust behaviors. Clearly, we suspect that there may be something to this thinking, but our present study does not allow further exploration or conclusions here.

Leadership behaviors and trust behaviors are means to an end, namely, student learning. The findings of this study suggest that when principals are trustworthy, they set a tone that influences how teachers relate to one another, to students, and to the community at large. Where faculty trust in the principal is high, academics are taken more seriously and student achievement is higher as a result. This chain of reasoning may make intuitive sense; however, in positing it, we run the risk of reducing a complex system to a simple one. Wanting to avoid that, we consider another implication of the findings.

As has been found in previous studies of school leadership, much of the principal’s effect on student learning is indirect (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Zeinabadi, 2014). The work of principals is set within a multi-faceted community, comprised of varying groups, subgroups, and individuals, including teachers, parents, community members, staff, and students, who often have competing if not conflicting agendas. As described in the opening discussion of this article on the nature of complex systems, each individual is both an actor in and acted upon by the system. That is, individuals and groups within the organization both affect and are affected by the composite school community. While we found that collegial and instructional leadership were each only correlated moderately with student achievement, the construct of school climate was more strongly correlated with student achievement. This finding not only reiterates the indirect effect of principal leadership on student achievement, but it seems to reaffirm the conceptualization of the complexity of school organizations. School climate was operationalized in the present study by three different factors: teacher professionalism, academic press, and community engagement. When evaluated both individually and together, these three factors were strongly correlated with student achievement. Thus, a relationship exists between these collectively produced and experienced characteristics of schools and the aggregated standardized measures of student achievement.

For principals to earn the trust of their teachers, it takes more than good intentions; it takes a strong set of ethical principles and core values as well as the skills and knowledge to enact those values. In light of the findings of this and similar studies, it should be clear that principal preparation programs are duty bound to equip prospective school leaders with the ethical understandings and requisite skills to foster trust in their school settings. This will include not only a knowledge of curriculum and instruction, but of emotional intelligence, empathy, problem solving and conflict resolution skills, as well as models for fostering shared decision making. This is a tall order, but school leaders lacking these competencies are unlikely to be trusted, however, good their intentions, and thus the schools they lead are unlikely to successfully foster student learning. Beyond the initial preparation program, school leaders need to be supported once in the field to handle the complex challenges they face in a trustworthy manner. Individualized professional development through coaching is a promising approach for extending this support.

In the present study, we investigated the constructs of interest in two distinct school districts. A small but growing body of literature suggests that dynamics at the
district level can influence the level of trust at the building level (Daly, 2009). Superintendents need to set a tone of trust in their districts by not only modeling trustworthy behaviors themselves but also by extending trust to their principals through genuine shared decision making. They can also avoid adopting an overly bureaucratic culture in their organization (Forsyth and Adams, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

To take seriously the increasingly compelling literature of the essential nature of trust to high functioning schools challenges much of current practice in the policy realm. Policy makers who understand the critical importance of high trust environments to the core mission of schools would do well to resist policies that conceptualize schools as complicated systems when they are, in fact, complex systems. Structuring punitive systems of accountability does more to damage the potential to develop high trust school environments, and thus may do more harm than good in bringing about the desired outcome of greater equity and excellence for children in all school contexts.

**Directions for future research**

There is a growing interest in the importance of trust in facilitating the constructive interpersonal relationships of well functioning, academically successful schools. While our study provides new insights and implications, a number of new questions and compelling directions for future research also emerge. First, having evidence that faculty trust in the principal is so strongly related to the climate of the school, we need greater understanding of the dynamics that foster faculty trust in the principal. An understanding of the conditions and processes that enable teachers and administrators to learn to trust each other and cooperate together is critical as schools are increasingly faced with the volatility of changing expectations. We need to know more about the mechanisms for building initial trust, regardless of whether a school leader is entering a building where the climate is dysfunctional and in need of revision or one with a strong extant culture of academic press, teacher professionalism, and community engagement. Qualitative or longitudinal studies of the formation of trust in schools would be useful.

Furthermore, educators and researchers need to understand more about the mechanisms that link trust and achievement. This represents yet another important direction for future research. To what extent is faculty trust in the principal related to the collective teacher efficacy beliefs of a school faculty? To what extent is faculty trust in the principal related to teachers’ propensity to innovate and take risks? What are the mechanisms through which trust in the principal manifest in higher academic press? How does the district context relate to trust in schools, and how does the SES of the school population correlate to leadership and trust? The groundwork laid to date provides a rich foundation for future scholarship on trust in schools.

**Conclusion**

School climate is clearly a salient aspect of school life, and trustworthy leadership seems to play an important role in fostering the conditions that make for a productive climate. Schools are likely to benefit from a greater understanding of the dynamics of and consequences of trust in schools. Principals are more likely to be trusted when they are approachable and demonstrate openness to ideas and suggestions made by teachers, staff, parents, and even students. In order to foster trust, principals must also be competent in their duties as instructional leaders. For principals to live up to the
aspirations that we have for them, they will need to function as trustworthy leaders. School leaders and those who prepare future school leaders would do well to attend to the growing body of research suggesting the importance and nature of leadership behaviors that foster positive and productive climates. The findings of this study regarding the crucial role that faculty trust in the principal makes to the climate and outcomes of schools clearly indicate that school leaders need to be knowledgeable in matters of trust. They need to know that the time it takes to establish and maintain trusting relationships is time well spent because it helps create the conditions necessary for schools to meet their goals.

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About the authors

Professor Megan Tschannen-Moran (PhD, Ohio State University) is a Professor of Educational Leadership at the College of William and Mary. Her research on trust in schools explores how teacher, student, principal, and parent trust are related to important outcomes such as teacher professionalism, academic press, and student achievement. Her research on educators' self-efficacy examines the antecedents and consequences of these beliefs. Her book, *Trust Matters: Leadership for Successful Schools* (2nd ed.) (2014, Jossey-Bass), as well as *Evocative Coaching: Transforming Schools One Conversation at a Time* (2010, Jossey-Bass), Co-authored with her husband Bob, bring these theories to a practitioner audience. Professor Megan Tschannen-Moran is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: mxtsch@wm.edu

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