

6-8-2010

# The Impact of a Principal's Sex on the Climate of Alternative Schools

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THE IMPACT OF A PRINCIPAL'S SEX ON THE CLIMATE  
OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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May, 2010

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
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This study investigated the impact of a leader's sex on the climate of alternative schools. Specifically, the problem was "Does a principal's sex have an impact on the climate of alternative schools?" The research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Do differences with regard to a principal's sex exist within the following subsets of alternative school climate: collaboration, student relations, alternative school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation?
2. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff?
3. Based on the data, what themes emerge, based on the principal's sex, on the following alternative school profile characteristics: student attendance, student discipline, and academic performance?
4. What key factors regarding alternative school climate emerge as significant based on the results of this study?

A mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative components, suggested the answers to these questions. Quantitative data were obtained through a survey, the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire that participants took online. Data

were collected and analyzed in order to determine significance. The statistical techniques used in this study were analysis of variance, the *t*-test, and measures of central tendency.

A qualitative piece was included in this study and occurred through an interview. Participants in this study were selected using the method of “purposive sampling” described by Lincoln & Guba (1985), on the basis of their leadership status within an alternative school in Monroe, Pike, or Northampton Counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The purpose of this study was to add to existing literature on sex differences in educational leadership. A thorough review of the literature revealed little relevant research on the impact of the principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. With the number of alternative schools on the increase, more studies are needed on these schools, the students, and their leaders.

## DEDICATION

To Chloe, Morgan, and Natalie

...explain by living it...clarify by learning from it...discover & smile – that’s the idea, right?

...talk-sing-dance-love-love-love!

...in bibemus...and beyond...

-L.D.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

Since the mid-1980s women have gained ground in the area of leadership, particularly with respect to leadership positions in education (Montgomery & Growe, 2003). From 1998 to 2006, the percentage of women administrators increased from 33% to 45% in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This rise in women as leaders in education has justified the need for further research with regard to a principal's sex, and how a principal's sex impacts various systems within the schools. This study examines, more closely, the role of a principal's sex on two specific systems—school climate and alternative education. Although the research on both school climate and alternative education exists separately, little relevant research on the impact of a principal's sex on the climate of alternative schools was located. The findings of this study add to current research on sex and the principalship, school climate, and alternative education.

This study examines the effect of a principal's sex on the climate of alternative schools. However, the leader's sex is the emerging theme, and the impetus for the study. For the purpose of this study, sex is defined as the self-identification of the participant as either male or female. The terms sex and gender are not used interchangeably, as this study examined differences in leadership strictly with regard to the principal's biological sex. However, the research conducted within this current study will identify characteristics of men and women as leaders and identify whether masculine or feminine leadership traits emerge. Researchers frequently use the terms sex and gender indiscriminately, depending

partly on their disciplinary specialty and partly on the use in vogue in different eras. For this study, the term gender is understood to refer to a set of culturally defined traits, behaviors, and roles that are differentially assigned to men (“masculinity”) and women (“femininity”). However, because gender is internalized in unique ways, some men may be described as having a more feminine style than is typical of the culturally mandated masculinity and some women may be described as having a more masculine style. This is particularly true for descriptors of leadership style. This study was not designed to directly study gendered leadership styles, but rather was limited to exploring sex differences between men and women principals that might be associated with different climates in alternative schools.

Studies have previously been done to determine what types of leaders women are compared to their male counterparts, but there are many gaps in the research, particularly within the field of education, and more specifically, within the subgroup of alternative education schools. This gap exists primarily because of the lack of research with regard to alternative education. Since the establishment of alternative schools, there has been an increase in the number of students who are identified “at risk” for failure. Concurrently, there has been an increase in the number of students who are educated in nontraditional schools (Guerin, Gilbert, Denti, & Lou, 1999). Many students in alternative settings exhibit behavior problems, learning difficulties, or have experienced other outside influences that get in the way of their learning in traditional school settings. When one of these issues, or a combination of the issues, causes a student to experience difficulties in school, students are considered to be “at-risk” of failing or not graduating. These students have been placed together in alternative settings, oftentimes with smaller teacher-student ratios than in

traditional schools. In 2009, there were 619 alternative education programs in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Contemporary alternative schools in Pennsylvania come in many forms, including charter schools, special vocational schools, magnet schools, gifted placement alternatives, boot camps, and alternative schools for disruptive youth (Hosley, 2003). In addition, alternative programs for students may also include cyber schools, mental health treatment facilities, and in-house programs that are designed to meet the needs of non-traditional students within the public school setting. This study focused on the model of the alternative school for disruptive youth, which the Pennsylvania Department of Education defines as follows: “Removes disruptive students from regular school programs in order to provide those students with a sound educational course of study and counseling designed to modify disruptive behavior and return to a regular curriculum” ([www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)).

Six alternative education school principals, three males and three females, participated in this study. Principals were selected from schools within the Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 boundaries, which encompass Monroe, Northampton, and Pike Counties. Only three female leaders were located within this area. The schools led by males and females had similar profile characteristics. The alternative schools in this geographic area are representative of demographic profiles of alternative schools across the Commonwealth.

This study examined differences in school climate with regard to the alternative school principals’ sex. A recent meta-analysis of sex and leadership (Van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2004) suggested mixed empirical evidence for sex differences in leadership. However, according to a 1991 study by Porat, “Schools administered by women

on the average were superior in performance to those managed by men. “The quality of pupil learning and the professional performance of teachers appear to be higher, on the average, in schools with female administrators” (p. 13). If this hypothesis is accurate, it is important that more research be conducted to confirm this finding. At least intuitively, a principal’s leadership style is likely to have a significant impact on a school. And more significantly, if leadership style is differentiated between males and females, the differences should be studied and analyzed.

Carol Shakeshaft (1987), a researcher on the topic of women in educational administration, discussed the differences between the ways women and men manage schools in her book *Women in Educational Administration*. She discussed the fact that many studies have been conducted that have found no differences in leadership styles and traits between men and women. She also pointed out that these studies have viewed “women within a male framework and from a theoretical background formulated on male behavior” (p. 167). It is not surprising, then, that there would be few differences discovered. The studies found no differences because in order for women to become principals and be successful, women had to act and perform like men. This could be due largely to the existence of only male models for leadership. According to Denmark (1977), most leadership studies are “concerned with males, at least male leaders” (p. 99). Shakeshaft went on to state that, “the lack of the gender variable in studies of leadership points to the gaps in existing research and theoretical models” (p. 100).

The lack of this gender, or sex variable continued through the 1980s and 1990s as well. Holander and Yoder (1980) wrote that, “Leadership historically has been a masculine

concept” (p. 267). Their argument mirrored Denmark’s (1977) in that they stated that the study of leadership, over time, has focused primarily on males. They also stated that, “there has been a greater impetus to do research on sex-related similarities and differences in leadership behavior” (p. 267). In 1992, Eagley, Karau, and Johnson completed a meta-analysis of literature on sex and leadership styles among school principals. It was during this review of literature that the analysis of specific differences and styles began to emerge. They noted specific differences in the ways that men and women lead.

The need for a study on the effect of a principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools is imperative at this time, with the number of alternative schools on the rise in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This research provides insights into alternative schools, while studying the effects of sex and leadership on this type of school. Research exists that describes sex differences with regards to leadership. In addition, research on school climate indicates that there is a relationship between school climate and student achievement. In 1978, Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, and Wisenbaker conducted a study within the Detroit school system. They concluded that the students’ “sense of academic futility clearly contributes more than any of the other climate variables” (p. 314) they studied, including perceived evaluations and teacher expectations. However, a link has not been established that connects the research on sex differences in leadership, alternative education, and school climate. This research links the three, attempting to explain the effect, if any, of a principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools.



## **Background of the Study**

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2001) published a table entitled “Principals in Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, by Selected Characteristics: 1993-94 and 1999-2000”. This table identified selected characteristics of principals, including sex. A difference was noted between the two time periods studied with respect to public school principals. During the 1993-1994 school year, there were 79,618 principals; 52,114 (65.4%) were men and 27,505 (34.5%) were women. A change was evident in the data gathered during the 1999-2000 school year. During this year there were 83,790 principals, 47,130 (56.2%) were men and 36,660 (43.8%) were women. Although the number of male principals exceeded the number of female principals, the difference appeared to be decreasing.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education presents data from as early as the 1998-1999 school year and as recent as the 2005-2006 school year. During the 1998-1999 school year, there were 957 secondary principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Of those, 795, or 83% were males and 162, or 17% were females. The most recent data provided by the Commonwealth suggests an increase in the number of female administrators. During the 2005-2006 school year, there were 899 secondary principals. Although there was a notable decrease in the number of principals within this time span, the number of female principals was higher than in previous years. During this year, there were 667 male principals, representing 74% of the group and 232 female principals, or 26% of the total. During this eight year span, the percentage of females acting as secondary principals rose by 9%.

It appears, from looking at data from national and state sources, that more women are pursuing administrative positions, specifically, the principalship. It is for this reason that the need exists for further research on the effect that a principal's sex has on schools, specifically, alternative schools.

### **Overview of the History of Alternative Education**

Alternatives within the public school arena have existed since the beginning of American education (Young, 1990). Educators and philosophers emphasized a belief in child-centered and progressive education, which eventually influenced educators to establish the traditional schooling norms that still exist today in the United States.

Several movements in alternative education occurred in the last century. The first occurred in the early 1900s when the Montessori and Waldorf Schools opened. A second movement in alternative education occurred in the 1960s. Terms used to describe this period included free schools, humanistic education, and holistic education. During this time frame, according to Young (1990), educational opportunities differed based on race, gender, and social class and "Despite their origins in the earliest days of our country, alternatives, as we know them in the most modern sense, find their roots in the civil rights movement" (p. 2).

In 1965, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which scrutinized the public school system and stressed the need to emphasize equity. Government funding backed this act, which allowed for new and different alternatives for students, particularly disadvantaged and minority students. Alternatives to traditional public education were established both within the public school system and outside of the public school system.

The Alternative Education Movement expanded in the 1970s and 1980s, further separating from traditional education models and increasing non-traditional ideologies. Since the 1980s, many alternatives to public education have been established. Private school settings, both secular and parochial, exist as an option for parents and students to consider. In addition, the charter school movement has led to an increase in charter schools maintained within public school entities. Home school movements also continue to grow, as do cyber school enrollments. For the purpose of this research, however, the term alternative schools refers to programs that are designed to prevent students at risk of dropping out or failing because traditional methods do not meet their educational needs.

Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that while alternative schools and programs have evolved over the years to mean different things to different audiences, several key common elements that address the needs of a large group of students at risk of dropping out are noted. These elements include academics, relationships with teachers and peers, and school size.

Alternative schools have evolved based on philosophies and ideologies from the early 1900s. As discussed further in chapter 2, alternative education provides opportunities for students to achieve success despite challenges that they face both in and out of the classroom. These challenges and frustrations, at times, cause children to be disruptive and labeled “at risk.” Students identified as “at risk” are most likely to fail and/or drop out of school. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, today’s alternative schools provide a combination of “intense, individualized academic instruction and behavior modification counseling in an alternative setting to assist students to return successfully to the regular classroom” ([www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)). Providing an alternative education setting for some

students provides principals and teachers an opportunity to re-create the child-centered, progressive approach to education that was envisioned by philosophers and educators more than a century ago.

According to the most recent data offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, there are 899 secondary principals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Of this number, 74% or 667 are male and 26% or 232 are female. Little research exists on principal leadership in alternative settings, particularly with regard to sex and the effect of a principal's sex on alternative schools. This study examines the question of whether or not sex differences affect the climate of alternative schools.

A growing body of literature exists on sex differences in leadership. Brown and Irby (1995), in the book *Women as School Executives: Voices and Visions*, described a study conducted by Texas Woman's University graduate students. This particular study, which analyzed interview data gathered from 57 female administrators in the Texas Metroplex public schools, offered information about job satisfaction and dissatisfaction among women administrators. The women interviewed for the study did not believe that they needed to conform to the characteristics of male administrators in order to be good leaders. They agreed that "good leadership is gender-free" and that "characteristics of successful administrators are not gender related" (Funk, 1994, p. 67). Much of the literature also suggests that women and men leaders in education exhibit similar characteristics, but research regarding these characteristics is limited within the domain of alternative education. Further, the research lacks a connection between women and men leaders, alternative education, and school climate.

### **Problem Statement**

This study was designed to investigate whether a principal's sex impacts the climate of alternative education schools. Specifically, the problem was "Does a principal's sex have an impact on the climate of alternative schools?" The researcher sought to understand answers to the following four questions:

1. Do differences with regard to a principal's sex exist within the following subsets of alternative school climate: collaboration, student relations, alternative school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation?
2. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff?
3. Based on the data, what themes emerge, based on the principal's sex, on the following alternative school profile characteristics: student attendance, student discipline, and academic performance?
4. What key factors regarding alternative school climate emerge as significant based on the results of this study?

These questions were addressed throughout the study, which was designed to answer the primary question on the impact of a principal's sex on alternative school climate. Several qualitative approaches were considered within this study in order to determine the answers to these questions.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to add to existing literature on sex differences in educational leadership. To date, studies have primarily viewed women leaders within a male

framework and from a “theoretical background formulated on male behavior” (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 167). This study analyzed the impact that male and female administrators have on the climate of their alternative schools. Although men and women were studied in similar situations, their experiences were noted as individuals as well as compared as part of a larger group. Perhaps the most important purpose for this study was to add to the current knowledge base of sex differences in educational leadership. A thorough review of the literature revealed little relevant research on the impact of the principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. With the number of alternative schools increasing, more studies are needed on these schools, the students, and their leaders.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to McGrath (1992), the 1990s reflected a first in American history. For the first time, white males were a minority in the American work place. The United States Department of Labor predicted within the next decade, 75% of the individuals entering the workforce would be minorities or women. According to the United States Department of Labor, statistics from 2001-2002 indicate that the category of “executive, administrative, and managerial” makes up approximately 30% of the total workforce, and that men and women in this sector are about equal (15.2% of the total workforce for men; 14.9% of the total workforce for women). This finding indicates a growing need for research comparing the effectiveness of the sexes within their field of employment. Although these statistics represent the general workforce, the lack of research on sex and leadership, particularly in educational leadership positions supports this need further.

This research is significant to central office administrators hiring for positions opening within their district. It is significant for individuals in higher education as well. Since the 1980s, women have made up half of the new enrollments into administrative degree programs in universities (Bell & Chase, 1993). The information from this study is also significant for programming at the higher education level. It is important that future teachers and teacher leaders be educated about the history of alternative schools, the primary reasons why children are identified “at-risk,” and how to teach this population of students in order for them to be successful.

Most importantly, this study is significant because it merged three elements significant to school systems: educational leadership, alternative education, and school climate. Alternative schools assist, arguably, society’s neediest children. It is imperative that positive school climates be established that maximize student learning and best teaching practices. Ultimately, the school’s leader is responsible for creating a climate where such goals are achievable. This research determined whether a principal’s sex impacts school climate. It adds to a necessary body of research that continues to emerge within the realm of alternative education.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

The methodological design of the study was both quantitative and qualitative; however, qualitative elements emerged most strongly. Mixed methods research, as defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), is a “class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (p. 17). Essentially, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie characterize this

type of research as the “third wave” research movement after the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The goal of mixed-methods research is to draw from the strengths of both paradigms in order to complete well-rounded, thorough research on a particular topic.

This study quantitatively involved survey data; however, it emerged as a qualitative case study of six alternative schools. “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 21). The description is qualitative, that is, instead of reporting findings in numerical data, “case studies use prose and literary techniques to describe, elicit images, and analyze situations” (p. 21). According to Merriam (1990), the case study is the best way to study social units which consist of many variables. The case study helps to expand the reader’s experiences and answer questions. The case study “plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base” (Merriam, 1990, p. 32).

This mixed methods case study looked at six alternative school administrators, three males and three females, within their work places. The nature of the study allowed the researcher to gather important data on the demographics of the subjects as well as learn firsthand the impact of the principals on their schools. Several qualitative research methods were used, including interviews, questionnaires, and a review of school data.



## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined, as they are used in this study, for referencing purposes:

**Alternative School** – “Removes disruptive students from regular school programs in order to provide those students with a sound educational course of study and counseling designed to modify disruptive behavior and return to a regular curriculum” ([www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)).

**Sex** – The self-identification of the participant as either male or female.

**Gender** – A set of culturally defined traits, behaviors, and roles that are differentially assigned to men (“masculinity”) and women (“femininity”).

**Sexism** – Discrimination based on sex or gender, especially discrimination against women based on stereotypical attitudes about women’s sex roles and gender attributes.

**School Climate** – The teachers’ perception of the school environment based on their level of collaboration with each other and superiors, positive student relations, adequate school resources, decision making autonomy, and instructional innovation within the teaching and learning environment.

**Collaboration** – A subset of school climate, whereby teachers design instructional programs together, communicate and work with each other, discuss the needs of individual students, and where good teamwork is emphasized.

**Student Relations** – A subset of school climate, whereby students are well mannered and respectful of school staff, where most students are helpful, cooperative, well behaved, and motivated to learn.

**School Resources** – A subset of school climate, whereby instructional equipment is consistently accessible and the library has sufficient resources and materials

**Decision Making** – A subset of school climate, whereby teachers are frequently asked to participate in decisions.

**Instructional Innovation** – A subset of school climate, whereby new and different ideas, including new courses and curriculum are implemented and teachers are willing to use innovative and new teaching approaches.

**Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment (PSSA)** – The standardized assessment of students in Pennsylvania in grades three through eleven to measure academic proficiency in reading and mathematics.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** - The required levels set for student achievement, graduation rate, attendance, safety, and highly qualified teachers on an annual basis established by the federal mandate *No Child Left Behind*.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study took place in the fall of 2009. The preliminary work for the study including letters of intent, Institutional Review Board application, and final approval of the proposal occurred in the summer of 2009.

The researcher spent time with each participant in the study at their schools gathering data and interviewing the administrator. In addition, surveys were distributed to staff at each building via an online surveying tool. The data were recorded and analyzed during the fall and the results were published and shared with the participants and with the final review board for this dissertation.

The format of this paper follows that of a traditional dissertation. Chapter 1 has included an introduction to the problem and the organization of the study and will conclude with a brief overview of the entire chapter.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature. The literature focuses on leadership with respect to sex differences to see if there have been reported differences in traits and leadership styles between males and females within the realm of education. The literature first examines women in leadership, as this dissertation focuses primarily on the leadership of women. Several meta-analyses are included in the literature review in order to examine a synthesis of a large amount of literature that already exists on this topic. This chapter also includes a more detailed history of alternative education. A portion of chapter 2 is also devoted to a description of the survey tool that is used in the methodology, which is based on school climate. A discussion of school climate is also included.

Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology of the study. In this chapter the researcher looks at the parameters of the study in depth and discusses the questionnaire that the staff completed, as well as the interview protocol used with the principals. Six principals were interviewed and the staff members of the six schools participated by completing an on-line survey. The questionnaire is discussed and analyzed in this chapter. The interview and format for the observations are also discussed. Also included are the methods used for analyzing this research.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the findings of the study, characteristics of the participants, and analysis of data. It also addresses themes in interviews and results of the

study. The results are indicated by answers to each of the research questions. The plan for implementation is further discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the results, analysis, and conclusions of the study. The problem statement is revisited and reconsidered to suggest further study that might be undertaken to explore the influence of leadership style on alternative schools.

### **Chapter Summary**

The discussion of sex differences in leadership has become significant, as the number of female administrators is increasing. Additionally, it is important to determine whether or not a principal's sex impacts the climate of an alternative school due to the increase in the number of alternative schools and the relative lack of research in this area. The unique nature of an alternative school allows for this study to occur naturally and the number of alternative schools within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania offers an appropriate selection for study. Alternative education schools and principals were chosen for this study because they are not a widely studied group and while the literature on alternative education, leadership, and school climate exists separately, this researcher found few studies linking the three.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter includes a review of the literature that is pertinent to the topic of sex as it relates to the principalship. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not a principal's sex has an impact on alternative schools. In reviewing the literature, several major themes emerged. These themes are discussed throughout chapter 2 in order to determine whether or not a principal's sex affects the school that he or she leads. The major themes discussed are the different leadership styles of men and women, leadership styles of women school administrators, perceptions about male and female leaders, sex differences in leadership, attitudes of leaders and followers toward sex roles, the effect of leadership style on others' behaviors, alternative education, and school climate.

#### **Criteria for Selecting the Literature**

Several types of literature were chosen for this review. The literature, which included articles, studies, and books, was found in several locations, including peer-reviewed journals which included *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Contemporary Education*, and more. This literature review discusses research that has been conducted on women and leadership and sex differences in leadership in the forms of both quantitative and qualitative studies. Several statistical databases were consulted, including the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), Center for Educational Statistics (CES), as well as other national education websites. Finally, several

monographs and edited compilations were reviewed, which focus on a leader's sex and the impact it has on leadership.

Many articles from peer-reviewed journals were reviewed. These articles deal primarily with sex differences in leadership. Many of these articles were located in *EBSCOhost*, which is a group of databases with a number of sources, covering many subjects that are not necessarily related to education. Most of the material found in this database comes from journals, newspapers, and government documents.

The studies that are discussed have been written by a variety of researchers, each looking at different aspects of sex and leadership. For example, Grove and Montgomery (2003) examined the under-representation of women in leadership. They scrutinized this sex gap in education, as well as other occupational fields. They based their research on the assumption that there are obvious barriers for women, which have been created by society. Their research is based on the premise that women must confront these barriers while moving upward in their careers.

O'Rourke and Papalewis (1989) documented nine women in a case study of female administrators and considered their beliefs about the world, and qualities of leadership that they thought were important. This case study also examined the female administrators' perceptions of the differences between male and female leadership styles. The participants in this study were interviewed, with the implications of the findings being used for women in school administration leadership positions, training programs, college textbooks, hiring practices, and promotional decisions.

A meta-analytic review of 17 studies was completed by Dobbins and Platz (1986). This review considered the subordinates of male and female leaders and compared them on measures of initiating structure, consideration, subordinate satisfaction, and effectiveness.

Each study selected for this literature review contributes to the theme of the study, which is women and leadership. Several studies discuss women as leaders apart from sex differences, while others highlight and scrutinize the differences between male and female leadership. While not all studies were completed in an educational setting, the information is used to formulate the methodology and attempt to determine areas in which research is still needed.

The books chosen include, but are not limited to, *Out of Women's Experience: Creating Relational Leadership* (Regan & Brooks, 1995); *The Effective Principal Perspectives on School Leadership* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986); *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge* (Bennis & Nanus, 1985); and *Megatrends for Women* (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). These books are primary resources for several of the articles and studies that were chosen. These books were written from 1986-1995. Additional books on leadership, including *Leadership Theory and Practice* by Peter Northouse were also considered.

### **Sex Differences in Leadership**

The literature review revealed several different philosophies regarding sex differences in leadership. These philosophies, offered by several authors and researchers focused on leadership behaviors, or descriptions of leadership types. Leadership behaviors were

categorized according to masculine and feminine behaviors and commonalities were noted that were discussed within studies and journal articles.

Male leaders rate as more effective than female leaders in laboratory settings, according to Dobbins and Platz (1986). Gibson (1995) stated that men emphasize goal setting and Eagley (1987) discussed men's agentic qualities, which include being assertive, goal directed, controlling, aggressive, ambitious, dominating, independent, self-reliant, self-sufficient, direct, and decisive. Rosner's (1990) description mirrored Eagley's in that he discussed a male's leadership role as being a series of transactions with subordinates in which rewards are exchanged for services and punishment is exchanged for inadequate performance. Men, as Kruger's (1996) study suggested, spend more time on administrative tasks and external contacts than do women. Connor (1992) believed that the key difference in male and female leadership styles was that men lead through concrete exchanges, a quid-pro-quo approach; for example, early release from work is granted if job performance is satisfactory.

Several other studies were reviewed that led to further descriptions of male leadership style traits. Desjardins (1985) concluded that men, when compared to women, excel in self-esteem, self-confidence, enjoy a challenge, have more self-control, are more involved in change, and are more committed to community service. Shakeshaft (1987), who has written extensively on the topic of sex differences in leadership, has found that men are less likely to give direct feedback to females than to males. Rosenfeld's and Fowler's (1976) description of male leadership traits included descriptives such as mature, forceful, competitive, moral, utilitarian, analytical, and valuing people.



Descriptions of female leadership qualities reveal a different set of strengths. Although Bass (1990) could not find a clear pattern of differences in leadership behaviors, he did note some differences in women, including that they are more charismatic leaders and they temper criticism with positive feedback. Gibson (1995), who stated that men emphasize goal setting, believed that women emphasize interaction and facilitation. Gibson described female leadership traits as communal as compared to the male's agentic qualities. He concluded that women's leadership traits include nurturance, affection, ability to devote self to others, eagerness to soothe hurt feelings, helpfulness, sympathy, awareness of the feelings of others, and emotional expressiveness. Research completed in 1990 by Eagley and Johnson paralleled this description, claiming that women emphasize both interpersonal relations and task accomplishment. Women, according to their research, adopt a more democratic style than men.

Rosner (1990), who described male leadership as a series of leader-subordinate interactions, thought that women encourage participation, share power, energize, and enhance self-worth of others. Kruger (1996), who found no differences with respect to decision making and power, did note differences with respect to women being more oriented toward pedagogical tasks, spending more time on internal communication within the work place.

Ultimately, the literature suggests that women are more communication-oriented and more likely to care about individuals rather than tasks. Their leadership style has been described as connective, inviting others to participate and giving them a voice (Frasher & Frasher, 1979; Giligan, 1982; Lipman-Blumen, 1992; Marshall, 1988; McGrath, 1992; Porat,

1991; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001 ). Women's leadership style has also been described as visionary and facilitative, according to Montgomery and Growe (2003). This facilitative leadership style "allows others to make contributions through delegation, encouragement, and nudging from behind" (Montgomery & Growe, 2003, p. 2). Montgomery and Growe also concluded that women "emphasize the process by encouraging feelings of self-worth, active participation, and sharing of power and information" (p. 2).

Women, according to Eakle (1995), are most interested in transforming people's self-interest into organizational goals through the empowerment process. They "foster collaboration, share power equitably, are vision builders, and encourage risk taking" (Shantz, 1993, p. 18). Research conducted by Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) concurred, describing women as being able to empower, restructure, teach, provide role models, encourage openness, and stimulate questioning.

The concept of change has been a common theme revealed in the literature related to leadership. Karam (1994) identified three types of leadership behaviors, including vision behaviors, taking appropriate behavior and bringing about change; people behavior, providing care and respect for individual differences; and influence behavior, acting collaboratively. Rosener (1993) discusses similar behaviors in women leaders, believing that women encourage participation, share information, enhance other people's self-worth, and get others excited about their work.

Although there were other positive descriptions of women leaders, including Rosenfeld's and Fowler's (1976) description of women leaders being helpful, affectionate, nurturing, open-minded, and accepting blame, some research has indicated weaknesses in

women's leadership style. Larwood and Wood (1976) completed research that noted some of these weaknesses. Women, according to this research, fail to seek their maximum advantage, reach compromise too quickly when cooperation is required, and are more likely to withdraw psychologically from organizations when facing obstacles to promotion to higher levels. It is important to note that several studies found no sex differences in leadership styles, both overall and with respect to individual qualities such as motivation, self-esteem, and mental ability (e.g., Miner, 1974; Morrison & Sebold, 1974; Van Engen et al., 2001).

### **Women as School Administrators**

A growing body of literature is developing on the work behaviors of women as school administrators. This literature focuses on the distinct styles of women as leaders of schools. While there are some comparisons made between male and female leadership styles, this emerging literature-base attempts to report on the specific styles of women school leaders.

Several themes emerged in the literature, which were derived from case studies, interviews, comparative studies, studies of lived experiences, meta-analyses, dissertations, papers, articles, and books. These themes included sexism and sex discrimination, leadership style and characteristics of women as school administrators, and the growing number of women in leadership positions when compared to men.

According to studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, sexism was experienced by women administrators and this was a factor in their job satisfaction and work performance (Anderson, 1995; Coursen et al., 1989; Dunshea & Gay, 1998, Eakle & Wright, 1992). Some researchers continue to find that men are more capable school leaders than women and believe that women are less competitive and less productive than men (Grove, 2003).

Women, according to the research, encounter different expectations, are judged differently than male counterparts who are less qualified and who have less experience (Coursen et al., 1989). Women are expected to contribute in ways that are above and beyond what men contribute in order to gain the respect of their peers, subordinates, and community members: “Women must be better qualified than a man if she hopes to become a successful administrator. In view of the difficulties she will face, she has to be extraordinary” (Coursen et al., 1989, p. 92). The literature indicates that sex discrimination may be an obstacle that many women encounter in entering educational administration. This type of discrimination increases the pressure for women to be as successful as men in this job (Dunshea & Gaye, 1998).

Women experience sexism in ways that men do not. There are stereotypes that continue to exist for women, despite the movement into a new, seemingly more tolerant, millennium. Eakle (1995) found the following:

Women are still considered to be the primary caregivers for children. If a man devotes four nights a week to various school and community meetings, it is seen as “part of the job.” However, if a woman spends four nights a week away from her family, she is neglecting them. (p. 16)

For societal reasons, and because of the way gender is performed in interpersonal (especially cross-sex) interactions, sex role expectations influence a woman principal’s personal and professional life. It should be noted that studies show that other factors influencing the principalship include the principal’s race, class, personal and professional background, and the context within which she works (Smulyan, 2000). These factors,

contended Smulyan, affect four aspects of the principal's work: "Their entry into the principalship, their relationships with the community they served, their role within the larger institution within which they worked and the ways they balanced continuity in their school" (pp. 593-598). Smulyan's research is based on a qualitative life history/case study of three women principals, which examined these leaders' behaviors both in the school and within the larger community, including the social and cultural contexts within which they worked. Despite the obstacle of sexism, there is research to suggest that women may be more successful principals than men. Some, including Porat (1991), proposed that schools that are administered by women are, on average, superior to those led by men.

Leadership styles and characteristics of women school administrators continue to stand out as a theme in the literature. Some studies suggest that gender plays little or no role in an administrator's effectiveness as long as the principal is viewed as efficient and successful. In fact, some studies suggest that leadership styles may differ little and that sex is not as important as the role in leadership behaviors (Mertz, McNeely, & Sonja, 1995). Mertz and McNeely, in a 1993 study of aspiring and practicing administrators, stated that, "practicing administrators were defined by the similarity of their responses to common situations (what they do), rather than by their gender, school level, or Myers-Briggs type" (p. 20). Interestingly, Porat's (1991) research suggests that individuals who possess and exhibit feminine modes of leadership, despite sex, are more effective as administrators. Therefore, sex becomes less important than masculine versus feminine traits: "Research evidence strongly suggests that good school administration is more attuned to feminine than masculine modes of leadership behavior" (Porat, 1991, p. 413). In spite of this,

Porat also suggests that females will continue to attempt to emulate their male peers because of society's acceptance of males as leaders and the lack of female role models for aspiring female administrators.

James Frasher and Ramona Frasher (1979) discussed seven studies of administrative performance in *Educational Administration Quarterly*. These studies suggest that female administrators are as effective as men, and there is no evidence that there are sex-related differences in performance. On the other hand, a meta-analysis of a variety of studies, conducted by Eagley et al. (1992), suggests that females operate more democratically than males. This confirmed studies examined by Eagley and Johnson in 1990 and 1991. They concluded that, "Women who occupy the principal role are more likely than men to treat teachers and other organizational subordinates as colleagues and equals and to invite their participation in decision making" (Eagley & Wood., 1991, p. 8). Research, according to Shakeshaft (1987), supports the notion that women experience a typical school day differently than men do. She further states that it may be this different viewpoint that causes women administrators to behave and perform tasks differently. These behaviors and tasks include "ways they spend their time, in day-to-day interactions, in the priorities that guide their actions, in the perceptions of them by others, and in the satisfaction they derive from their work (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 170).

Kemetz and Willower (1982), as cited in in Shakeshaft (1987), found that women spend more time in unscheduled meetings and observe teachers more than do male principals. Gross and Trask (1964, 1976) found that women pay more attention to differences among students, spending less time on discipline issues and focusing more on the emotional

and social well-being of the child. Their research also supported the notion that female administrators view supervision and evaluation differently: “Women principals are more likely to emphasize teachers’ technical skills and their responsibility to the total school” (Gross & Trask, 1976, p. 173). Women are more often identified as educational leaders rather than building managers. Women respond to the demands of the job as principal differently, according to Shakeshaft, and respond in ways that are not like men respond. Drawing on Carol Gilligan’s seminal work (Gilligan, 1982), she delineates the different styles by aligning women to a “response and care” perspective and men to a “perspective of justice” (p. 195). Based on her own research and the meta-analysis of others, Shakeshaft has identified five traits of women school leaders based on what is known about female work behavior in schools:

1. Relationships with others are central to all actions of women administrators.
2. Teaching and learning are the major foci of women administrators.
3. Building community is an essential part of a woman administrator’s style.
4. Marginality overlays the daily worklife of women administrators.
5. The line separating the public world from the private is blurred.

(Shakeshaft, 1987, pp. 197-198)

Women spend more time communicating with people, paying careful attention to individual differences. They are more influential in matters of instructional learning and teaching methods, and they are more involved with staff, students, and the community. Essentially, despite the feeling of having to relate to and work as well as men, women are more likely to show consistency in both the public sphere of work and in the private sphere of home and

family (Shakeshaft, 1987). Berman (1982) has reported similar findings, indicating that women display:

1. A higher percentage of contacts identified by others, indicating more interaction with those around them.
2. Shorter desk work sessions during the school day and more time spent during after school hours.
3. A higher percentage of total contacts with superiors.
4. Longer average duration for scheduled meetings, phone calls, and unscheduled meetings.
5. Cooperative planning more often taking place during scheduled meetings. (p. 2)

The persistent themes which exist in the literature support that there are many similarities in the way that men and women lead, particularly in a school setting. Another theme exists, which discusses the possibility that men and women enter the principalship differently, which may indicate reasons why there are differences on the job.

Reports indicate that women spend longer time as teachers before entering the field of educational administration (Gross & Trask, 1976; Mertz & MCNeely, 1989). These researchers postulate that this is the reason why women administrators are attuned to teacher instruction and student learning. Research also reveals that women are not as likely to want to leave teaching as men. Hollway (2000) found that though women were not as likely to want to leave, they were highly qualified and were “somewhat more likely to have advanced degrees in related fields” (p. 85). An Alabama state-wide study conducted in 2000 by Spencer and Kochan found that more than 80% of the principals responding to the survey



were employed as principals in the schools where they were already employed as teachers. Of those who came from outside of the system, 75% were males, suggesting that females are more likely to continue working in their existing school systems.

In related research, there is a suggestion that women administrators may be reluctant to advance into administrative positions due to limited numbers of female role models (Holloway, 2000). Eagley et al. (1992) concurred by emphasizing that women administrators will continue to imitate the leadership styles of men for two reasons: First, this style of leadership is more known and accepted by the public, and second, because there are few role models for women entering administrative careers.

### **History of Alternative Education**

Alternatives within the public school arena have existed since the beginning of American education (Young, 1990). The roots of alternative education are traced back to three European educators: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Henrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel. As both educators and philosophers, they emphasized a belief in child-centered and progressive education, which eventually influenced both Francis Parker and John Dewey to establish the traditional schooling norms that still exist today.

The ideas of these three European educators also influenced Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner in the early 1900s. Montessori was an Italian pediatrician who opened a “children’s home” in 1907 and Steiner was an Austrian philosopher who started the first Waldorf School in 1919. Both the Montessori and Waldorf methods of education continue to emphasize the development of a child’s innate abilities and curiosities, in contrast to traditional education methods, which emphasize rote learning and a structured curriculum.

Following the lead of their progressive predecessors, Montessori and Waldorf have influenced alternative education movements throughout the United States history.

A second movement in alternative education occurred in the 1960s. Terms used to describe this period included free schools, humanistic education, and holistic education. Educational opportunities, according to Young (1990), differed based on race, gender, and social class. “Despite their origins in the earliest days of our country, alternatives, as we know them in the most modern sense, find their roots in the civil rights movement” (Young, 1990, p. 2).

During the 1950s and 1960s, public education was criticized for being racist and segregated. Raywid (1981) described schools at this time as “cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions, largely indifferent to the humanity and the ‘personhood’ of those within them” (p. 551). In 1965, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, scrutinizing the public school system and stressing the need to emphasize equity. Government funding backed this act, which allowed for new and different alternatives for students, particularly disadvantaged and minority students. Alternatives to traditional public education were established both within the public school system and outside of the public school system.

Project FORUM at National Association of State Directors of Special Education is a cooperative agreement funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education. The project completes research and prepares reports in order to provide information for program improvement and provide research for improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Through Project FORUM (2002), a report was completed

entitled “Alternative Education: A Brief History and Research Synthesis.” This report documented the history of alternative education, as well as specific populations in alternative schools, outcomes for students in alternative schools and programs, and implication for policy and practice. This report also discussed the alternative education systems within and outside of the public school system.

Two types of alternative schools were emerging during the 1960s, including the *Freedom Schools* and the *Free School Movement*. Freedom Schools, according to Project FORUM, were intended to provide education to minorities. These schools were run outside of the public school system in settings that included church basements and storefronts. Graubard (1972) described the Freedom School Movement as “one where groups of people sought control of the oppressive educational processes to which they and their children were being subjected” (p. 353). Community control of alternative education flourished during this time period.

The Free School Movement also existed during this time period. This movement emphasized achievement and fulfillment. “These schools were founded on the notion that mainstream public education was inhibiting and alienating too many students and that schools should be structured to allow students to freely explore their natural intellect and curiosity” (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 3). Both, the Freedom Schools and the Free School Movement, existed on the premise that students were alienated from traditional schools. Ultimately, according to Project FORUM’s research, these movements were seen as some of the first options outside of the public school system that were available to students. The latter half of the 1960s indicated the growing trend of alternatives to traditional education within

the public school system. These schools were characterized by “parent, student and teacher choice; autonomy in learning and pace; non-competitive evaluation; and a child-centered approach” (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 4).

The Alternative Education Movement continued to expand into the 1970s and 1980s, further separating from traditional education models and expanding non-traditional ideologies. For example, Cuban and Tyack (1995) suggested common threads among the alternative education movements that have been noted throughout the past six decades, including the following:

- From socializing students to be obedient, to teaching students to be critical thinkers;
- From passing on what is considered the best academic knowledge, to teaching practical knowledge and skills;
- From inculcating basic skills, to nurturing creativity and higher order thinking;
- From only providing the basics, to allowing for a range of choices;
- From fostering assimilation into a dominant culture, to affirming diversity;
- From affirming gender roles, to challenging gender roles; and
- From preserving the advantages of a favored class, to providing equal opportunity to achieve high status and profitable remuneration for all (p. 41).

Miller (2007) contended that traditional educational values have become even more evident in public school settings. He cites evidence from “A Nation at Risk” by the Reagan administration, “America 2000” from the Bush administration, “Goals 2000” from the Clinton administration, and finally the “No Child Left Behind” legislation passed most

recently during the George W. Bush administration. Despite being driven by different political agendas, each report led to sometimes massive federal mandates intending to ensure that *all* children are ready for the global economic workforce. As mandates increased, tighter governmental control over public education increased. Inevitably, the child-centered development of innate abilities approach of the early 1900s was less likely to occur in this type of public school setting. Although most students were able to adapt to this increasingly demanding public education model, children continued to emerge that did not meet success in this type of environment.

Today, many alternatives to public education exist. Private school settings, both secular and parochial, exist as an option for parents and students to consider. In addition, the charter school movement has led to an increase in charter schools maintained within public school entities. Home school movements also continue to grow, as do cyber school enrollments. For the purpose of this research, however, alternative schools refer to programs that have been created to prevent students at risk of dropping out or failing because traditional methods do not meet their educational needs.

Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that while alternative schools and programs have evolved over the years to mean different things to different audiences, several key areas that address the needs of a large group of students at risk of dropping out are noted. These areas include academics, relationships with teachers and peers, and school size.

Alternative schools have evolved based on philosophies and ideologies from the early 1900s. Alternative education provides opportunities for students to achieve success despite challenges that they face both in and out of the classroom. These challenges and frustrations,

at times, cause children to be disruptive and labeled “at risk.” Students identified as “at risk” are most likely to fail and/or drop out of school. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, today’s alternative schools provide a combination of “intense, individualized academic instruction and behavior modification counseling in an alternative setting to assist students to return successfully to the regular classroom” ([www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)). Providing an alternative education setting for some students provides principals and teachers an opportunity to re-create the child-centered, progressive approach to education that was envisioned by philosophers and educators more than a century ago.

### **Measuring School Climate Factors**

Research on school climate is readily available in the literature. In fact, an examination of school climate literature would reveal many models, theories, categories, and factors related to this topic. While developing the Revised Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire, Bruce Johnson, Joseph Stevens, and Keith Zvoch (2007) reviewed literature by authors of research related to measuring school climate (e.g., Bernstein, 1992; Brookover et al., 1978; Brown & Henry, 1992; Johnson, Johnson, & Zimmerman, 1996; Short & Rinehart, 1992; West, 1995). While the research of Brown and Henry (1992), Short and Rinehart (1992), and West (1985) was reviewed by Johnson, Stevens, and Zvoch in order to determine protocol for questionnaire research in schools, others were included for their work using questionnaire research to identify the impact that school climate has on schools.

Lawrence Bernstein (1990) analyzed the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) School Questionnaire, which was administered to leaders of schools that

included grades 4, 8, and 12 during the 1987-1988 school year. His analysis, *Policy Changes and School Climate: An Analysis of the NAEP School Questionnaire (1987-1988)*, examined the relationship between policy change and school climate within these grade levels. This study was federally mandated and had been conducted by the Educational Testing Service since 1983 with the support of the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Educational Statistics. A climate comparison questionnaire was one of many data collection tools used by the NAEP in order to gain valuable information about which schools, nationally, implement policy change and how school climate is impacted. Other data collection tools included teacher questionnaires and various student assessments. In addition to sets of questions dealing with policy change and demographics, administrators responded to a set of questions used to analyze school climate. For this particular study, respondents indicated whether or not conditions related to school problems were serious, moderate, minor, or problematic. Eleven school climate factors were used and included:

1. Student tardiness
2. Student absenteeism
3. Student cutting of classes
4. Physical conflicts among students
5. Robbery or theft
6. Vandalism of school property
7. Student use of alcohol
8. Student use of illicit drugs
9. Student possession of weapons

10. Physical abuse of teachers

11. Verbal abuse of teachers (p. 4).

A climate composite scale was developed using the response choices indicated and each variable was measured on a 4 point scale, with 4 representing serious, 3 indicating moderate, 2 for minor, and 1 for no problems indicated. The composite was calculated by dividing the sum of all responses by 11 and using the scale to indicate the overall climate measure. For example, an overall score of 2 would indicate that minor problems exist with regard to school climate. Bernstein created other composite scales for additional factors examined, including size and type of community, relative wealth and poverty, student enrollment, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Once he analyzed the data, Bernstein reported his findings on both policy change and school climate, by grade level. Then, he linked his findings in order to determine whether the two were related. With regard to school climate by grade level, the average composite of the 11 factors increased from grade 4 to grade 8, and then again from grade 8 to grade 12, which repeated a similar pattern as the policy change composite (p. 13). He stated that “problems tend to get more serious as one moves from grades four through grade eight up to grade twelve for all variables with the exception of physical conflicts among students” (p. 17). Ultimately, Bernstein concluded that additional efforts must be made to study relationships between policy change and school climate. His study also “provides the basis for developing further initiatives in investigating the usefulness of school questionnaire data to inform policy reform efforts in our nation’s schools” (p. 19).



In 1978, Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood, and Wisenbaker conducted a study in the Detroit School System. Using data gathered from questionnaires distributed to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, teachers, and principals in 24 randomly selected schools, they compared elementary school social climate and student achievement. Their study intended to find a correlation between a student's sense of academic futility and school level state achievement data obtained from the Michigan Assessment Program of the Michigan State Department of Education. Three variables were considered, and included school climate, school composition, and the dependent variable, which was academic achievement. For the purpose of their research, school climate was defined as follows:

The school social climate encompasses a composite of variables as defined and perceived by the members of this group. These factors may be broadly conceived as the norms of the social system and expectations held for various members as perceived by the members of the group and communicated to members of the group.

(Brookover & Erikson, 1975, p. 364)

Essentially, these norms and expectations are expressed as common beliefs about behavior in schools, which are typically expressed by members of the community and understood by members of the entire group. These researchers hypothesized that “a school's academic norms, expectations, and beliefs, which we call climate, are not synonymous with the social compositions of its student body; and therefore, climate is not adequately measured by composition variables” (Brookover, et. al, 1978, p. 303). School composition variables included socioeconomic status and percent white, or minority status of the school.

Questionnaires were read to the students and distributed to the teachers and principals. Climate variables within the questionnaires differed, but focused on academic achievement, expectations, and norms. Correlations between the school's climate means and academic means were observed. Student climate variables included:

1. Student Sense of Academic Futility
2. Future Evaluations and Expectations
3. Perceived Present Evaluations and Expectations
4. Perception of Teacher Push and Teacher Norms
5. Student Academic Norms

Teacher climate variables included:

1. Ability, Evaluations, Expectations and Quality of Education for College
2. Present Evaluations and Expectations for High School Completion
3. Teacher-Students' Commitment to Improve
4. Perception of Principal's Expectations
5. Teacher's Academic Futility

Principal climate variables included:

1. Parent Concern and Expectations for Quality of Education
2. Efforts to Improve
3. Evaluations of Present School Quality
4. Present Evaluations and Expectations of Students (p. 309)

The researchers concluded that the combination of school climate variables as expressed above do significantly contribute to the explanation of variance with student's academic

achievement. More than socioeconomic status and percentage of white students within the schools, the students' "sense of academic futility clearly contributes more than any of the other climate variables" (p.314). These researchers concluded that, "A school characterized by a high sense of academic futility, therefore, is one in which the students feel they have no control over their success or failure in the school social system, the teachers do not care if they succeed or not, and their fellow students punish them if they do succeed" (p. 314). Schools with a higher sense of academic futility, according to this study, tend to be schools where the majority of students are black or are identified as having a low socioeconomic status. However, they concluded that beyond the social composition of the school, favorable social-psychological school climate factors ultimately contribute to greater academic success.

William Johnson, Annabel Johnson, and Kurt Zimmerman published findings from a study they completed in 1996, which assessed the school climate of two school districts in Texas. A sample of 1,240 middle level and high school students were surveyed using the General Climate Factors section of the CFK Ltd. School Climate Profile (CFK). This instrument was created in the 1970s as a means by which to gather school climate data for organizational planning (Dennis, 1979; Phi Delta Kappa, 1974). The CFK is comprised of four sections, which include: General Climate Factors, Program Determinants, Process Determinants, and Material Determinants. Students participating in this study only completed the General Climate Factors section of the questionnaire. Within this section were 8 subscales, which included respect, trust, high morale, opportunity for input, continuous academic and social growth, cohesiveness, school renewal, and caring (p. 64).

This instrument required students to respond to 40 questions, which were listed in two columns, the “What Is” column, which represented the perceived status of the organization, and the “What Should Be” column, indicating the students’ desire. Students responded using a Likert-type scale, with 1 representing the lowest, or “almost never” score and 4 being the highest, indicating “almost always”.

For the purpose of their study, and prior to analyzing the results of the data, Johnson, Johnson, and Zimmerman used Hoy’s and Miskel’s definition of school climate, which refers to “students’ perceptions of the environment of a school, that distinguishes one school from another, and that influences the behavior of the students” (1991). Essentially, they stated that the climate “refers to the personality of a school” (p. 64). Since the CFK used two discrepancy-format columns, one for the “What Is” and one for the “What Should Be,” statistics were analyzed for both. The top three ordered rankings within the “What Is” category were respect, caring, and cohesiveness and the top three ordered rankings within the “What Should Be” column were high morale, respect, and trust. “What Is” and “What Should Be” means were calculated and the authors suggested that affective dimensions of school climate, such as caring and trust, are more desirable for school-intervention programs (p. 65).

While developing the questionnaire used for this current study, Johnson, Stevens, and Zvoch (2007) reviewed protocol for the development and use of the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (Appendix A). This review indicated that school climate has many meanings, ranging from shared norms and expectations, perceived teacher empowerment, students’ perceptions of the school, and the presence or absence of negative student behavior. Within these meanings, several subsets and factors exist.

For the purpose of this research, five subsets of school climate were studied: collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation. Because the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire—Revised was the primary tool for gathering data, these factors were extracted directly from the survey utilized. This survey was developed after many years of school climate survey research. The original Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ), consisted of 56 items. The survey was revised to reflect a 35-item instrument, and then was ultimately revised again, to reflect the current 21-item instrument that was used for this research.

In developing the revised survey, Johnson et al. (2007) reviewed existing school climate surveys and determined the appropriateness of several data gathering tools for school environments. Ultimately, using the research of Moos, as discussed in Rentoul and Fraser (1983), three general human relationship themes for all environments were considered, including relationships, personal development, and system maintenance and scales. Moos defines school climate as “the atmosphere of a setting or learning environment in which students have different experiences, depending upon the protocols set up by the teachers and administrators” (1979, p. 81). For the purpose of this survey, Moos’ three general human relationship themes were the basis for the items within the questionnaire. When considering relationships, Moos contends that this includes any involvement or connections to others in the classroom, including the teachers. Personal growth refers to the personal development of the individual and the class as a whole, and system maintenance refers to the order of the environment, including the rules, the strictness of the teacher, and impetus for system change. Moos cautioned that “although the specific type of educational environment needed

depends in part on the types of people in them and on the outcomes desired, at least we need to focus on relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance and change dimensions in describing, comparing, evaluating, and changing educational settings” (1979, p. 96).

For the purpose of this study and because the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire is the primary tool, school climate focuses on the combined efforts of the research studied in the development of the R-SLEQ. Using Moo’s work within the framework of relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance, Johnson determined that 5 subsets of school climate exist within these categories and they include collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation. Therefore, for this purpose of this study, school climate was defined as the teachers’ perception of the school environment based on their level of collaboration with each other and superiors, positive student relations, adequate school resources, decision making autonomy, and instructional innovation within the teaching and learning environment.

### **Perceptions of Male and Female Leaders**

More recent literature suggests that the differences in leadership styles of men and women may be dwindling (e.g., Barber & Daly, 1996; Mertz & McNeely, 1997). Reductions in sex role differentiation, sex discrimination, and segregation have been occurring, which have lessened the differences in leadership styles of males and females. Although this reduction is discussed throughout various literature, the perception that male and females lead differently still persists.

Morrison and Stein (1985) completed a study with 20 male and 20 female graduate students in professional psychology enrolled in a course on organizational behavior. The

students participated in both a Tavistock group relations conference and later, a T-group conference. Tavistock groups are analytic, self-study groups. The focus of the group is to study group processes, while emphasizing relationships toward authority. A group consultant limits interaction with the group, but rather acts as a coordinator of details, that is, plans the date and time of the meetings and offers interpretations of group process. This presents a laboratory type setting for studying group process. The consultant acts as a careful observer. In contrast, the T-group (Argyris, 1968; Bradford, Gibb, & Benne, 1964) allows group members to interact and change the perceptions of themselves as they participate in the group. The T-group may either focus on individuals or groups as a whole. The T-group trainer takes an active role in facilitating discussion and change. Therefore, the Tavistock consultant acts more as a facilitator, with little social and emotional interaction, while the T-group trainer provides modeling, constructive feedback, and suggestions. The hypothesis in this particular study was that a female Tavistock consultant would be less well-regarded than a female leader in a T-group setting.

After each of the 40 participants completed both the Tavistock and T-group conferences, they were given questionnaires about their experiences. Twelve men and 18 women completed the questionnaire on the Tavistock conference, which could be answered anonymously. Ten men and 14 women responded to the questionnaire regarding the T-group conference. The design of this particular study allowed for two female and two male group leaders at each conference. The leaders were assigned to groups that were nearly equal by sex. Within the questionnaire, five dimensions of member perceptions of leaders were analyzed: evaluation, potency, activity, task competence, and emotional/supportiveness.

T-group trainers, both male and female, were “more positively valued and seen as more emotionally expressive and supportive than Tavistock consultants with no differences in perceived potency, activity, or task competence” (Morrison & Stein, p. 11). Although male leaders were rated higher in the area of task competence, no other differences were noted as effects of leader sex. The study confirmed the prior ideas of the researchers that male trainers were “most positively valued,” despite the fact that the females had more experience with T-group conferences than their male counterparts.

The idea that perceptions about male and female leaders differ based on specific social contexts was also discussed by Newton and Zeitoun in 2002. Their quantitative study examined whether precise features of a principal’s role influence the attitudes and job search behaviors differently for men and women. Equal numbers of males and females participated in the study, which required individuals to “read and evaluate an announcement of a position of a vacancy” (p. 3). Using Likert-type scales, participants responded to four statements as a measure of overall job attraction:

1. How would you rate the overall attractiveness of the description of the principal vacancy?
2. How likely would you be to apply for the principal job described?”
3. How likely would you be to accept an interview for the principal as described?
4. How likely would you be to accept the job of principal as described? (Newton & Zeitoun, 2002, p. 3)

While the researchers attempted to verify three hypotheses with regard to the administrative model of the job description, the time necessary to devote to the job, and



participant's sex, information specific to participant's sex was most interesting. Although the researchers believed that there would be differences noted with regards to sex, few differences emerged. Initially, the researchers argued that the traditional school administrator model promoted a male stereotype and discouraged females from becoming likely candidates for intended vacancies. This research referred to Shakeshaft's (1989) views on segregation in the educational workplace and her studies on androcentric societies, where males are more likely to be promoted. Newton and Zeitoun (2002) revisit Shakeshaft's views on androcentrism and quote the following:

Androcentrism is the elevation of the masculine to the level of the universal and the ideal and honoring of men and the male principle above women and the female. This perception creates a belief in male superiority and a masculine value system in which female values, experiences, and behaviors are viewed as inferior. (Newton & Zeitoun, 2002, p. 95)

Ultimately, although the differences appeared minimal, specific discussions about workweek hours presented unfavorable differences between male and female respondents. With respect to workweek hours, women were "significantly less attracted to the principalship than were males," (p. 95) suggesting a need to restructure the position of principal differently in an effort to entice more women to apply for available positions.

### **Summary**

While the research on sex differences specifically with respect to leadership exists in various forms and sources, there remains a gap in specific research regarding the effect of a principal's sex on the school climate of alternative schools. Leadership in Alternative

Education and how it impacts school climate is not a widely studied phenomenon. Beyond that, the leadership of these schools is often overlooked in the research because the studies that exist focus primarily on the students or specific programs. This researcher was most interested in determining whether or not alternative schools are influenced by the leader, and whether or not the sex of the leader plays a particular role in the climate of the building among students and staff. And, while the research can easily be found on leadership styles, sex differences, and school climate, this researcher was not successful in locating current research that has linked sex differences, leadership styles, school climate, and alternative schools.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The goal of this study was to identify the impact of a principal's sex on the climate of alternative schools. In order to determine the impact of a principal's sex and discuss the relationships between the two, a mixed-methods research study was conducted. Data gathered from three sources were utilized in this study and included a survey, interview, and a review of records. The study benefited from both quantitative and qualitative research methods, which were used to assist the researcher in answering the four guiding questions for the study:

1. Do differences with regard to a principal's sex exist within the following subsets of alternative school climate: collaboration, student relations, alternative school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation?
2. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff?
3. Based on the data, what themes emerge, based on the principal's sex, on the following alternative school profile characteristics: student attendance, student discipline, and academic performance?
4. What key factors regarding alternative school climate emerge as significant based on the results of this study?

Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology for this study. Also included in this chapter are the research design, a description of the data collection instruments and procedures, discussion of the participants, and the data analysis procedures.

The study was designed to investigate the impact that a principal's sex has on the climate of alternative schools. Specifically, the problem was "Does a principal's sex have an impact on the climate of alternative schools?" This study was designed to examine the primary research question on the impact of a principal's sex on the climate of alternative schools.

A primary purpose of this study was to add to existing literature on sex differences in educational leadership and alternative education. To date, studies have primarily viewed women leaders within a male framework and from a "theoretical background formulated on male behavior" (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 167). This study compared the impact that male and female administrators have on the climate of their alternative schools. Although men and women were studied in similar situations, their experiences were noted as individuals as well as compared as part of a larger group. Perhaps the most important purpose for the study was to add to the current knowledge base of sex differences in educational leadership with specific regard to alternative education. This researcher has not discovered specific literature on the impact of the principal's sex on the climate of alternative schools. With the number of alternative schools increasing, more studies are needed on these schools, the students, and most importantly, their leaders who head the institution.

This research is also significant to central administrators hiring for positions open within their districts. It is significant for individuals in higher education as well. Since the

1980s, women have made up half of the new administrative enrollments in universities (Bell & Chase, 1993). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) revealed that women are increasingly holding principal positions. In their report prepared for the NCES, Hammer & Rohr (1994) indicated that from the 1984-85 school year to the 1990-91 school year, the proportion of women public school principals increased from 21 percent to 30 percent. This amounts to a 43 percent increase over the 6-year time period. The information from this study will be significant for programming at the higher education level and determining whether “feminine” leadership traits should be more consciously taught and fostered.

Most importantly, the research and the information gathered by this researcher will benefit the children that attend alternative schools. These at-risk students require a leader that understands and recognizes that they are non-traditional students. They require learning experiences that differ from their peers in order to meet with success. Because this researcher would argue that the leadership of a building is most important in determining the climate of a school, it is imperative that leaders be identified that will benefit the programming, staff, and most importantly, the climate of alternative schools.

## **Design**

### **Overview of the Methodology**

This study combined elements of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, making it a mixed-methods research study. Mixed methods research, as defined by Johnson and Burke (2004), is a “class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (p. 17). Essentially, Johnson and Burke believe it becomes the “third

wave” research movement after the quantitative and qualitative approaches (p. 17). The goal of mixed-methods research is to draw from the strengths of both paradigms in order to complete well-rounded, thorough research on a particular topic.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to use multiple approaches to answer research questions, rather than restricting the methodology to one approach. Johnson and Turner (2003) refer to this as the fundamental principle of mixed research. According to the principle of mixed research, “researchers should collect multiple data using different strategies, approaches, and methods in such a way that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses” (p. 18). The quantitative approach, which included both descriptive and inferential procedures, was used to analyze the questionnaire and school profile characteristics data. Means, standard deviations, and correlations provided the inferential analyses, while several *t*-tests were used to conduct inferential analyses.

The mixed methods model used for this study includes eight distinct steps, which are discussed in the work of Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004):

1. Determine the research question;
2. Determine whether a mixed design is appropriate;
3. Select the mixed method or mixed-model research design;
4. Collect the data;
5. Analyze the data;
6. Interpret the data;
7. Legitimate the data; and

8. Draw conclusions (if warranted) and write the final report. (p. 21)

Data gathered allowed this researcher to follow the steps identified by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie in order to answer the primary questions of this research.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study took place in the fall of 2009. The preliminary work for the study, including letters of intent (Appendix B), IRB application (Appendix C), and final approval of the proposal (Appendix D) occurred early in the fall of 2009. Six alternative education principals, three males and three females, participated in the study. Principals were selected from schools within the Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 boundaries, which encompass Monroe, Northampton, and Pike Counties. Schools within this Intermediate Unit were chosen because of their proximity to the researcher's University and the researcher. Only three female leaders were located within this area. The schools led by males have similar profile characteristics as those led by the three females. The alternative schools in this geographic area were representative of demographic profiles of alternative schools across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Additionally, teaching staff from the six principals' schools participated in and assisted this researcher with data collection. Principal and staff participation in the interview and survey was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw without penalty at any time. In addition, each alternative school was primarily a Grades 7-12 facility that assists students with targeted "at risk" behavior as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Each school was identified by a single letter—number combination (1M, 2M, 3M, 1F, 2F, 3F) to protect anonymity. The letters "M" and "F" were used to identify schools led by either "males" or "females".

## **School Profile Characteristics**

School 1M provides a variety of programming for behaviorally disruptive youth in grades 7-12. The six teaching staff that participated in this study work with approximately 30 students. This alternative education program provides Adventure Challenge Therapy at residential outdoor camps, as well as intensive home-based services for students on probation. In addition, School 1M works with school districts in its surrounding area to provide family counseling, in-home truancy counseling, alternative suspension programs, group homes, and vocational projects such as job corp.

School 2M is located approximately 30 minutes from School 1M. According to information presented to parents and school officials when registering students, the mission of this school, and its 22 teachers, is to “give hope, guidance, and healing in partnership with families and children in need.” In addition to a residential treatment facility, the school offers alternative education programming to students in Grades 2 through 12. Working with the students’ families and home school districts, School 2M creates individual plans to best meet the students’ individual academic and behavioral needs. The school provides special education services, speech and language therapy, behavior management, drug and alcohol counseling, career education, and extra-curricular activities, while providing small classes in a small school setting to approximately 100 students.

School 3M provides support to approximately 80 students. This school works closely with a University located within the Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 boundaries, and has been recommended for accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Secondary Schools. School 3M is a private day school for students aged 6 through 21 with severe behavioral and



emotional disabilities, including autism. This school is unique, in that it also serves as a teacher preparation program for approximately 30 pre-service teachers working with the University. Considered a “lab school,” School 3M prepares special education teachers to enter the workforce in Pennsylvania. As pre-service teachers, students receive “on-the-job” training as they work with students at the school. This school has been recognized, nationally, by the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Education & Labor, CNN, and the American Institute for Research for its focus on positive behavioral strategies to change student behavior.

School 1F is considered an “in-house” program, as it exists within an intermediate school and serves between 30 and 45 6<sup>th</sup>- and 7<sup>th</sup>-grade students throughout the school year. Two alternative education teachers work with the students in both pull-out and push-in support models. The teachers pull the students from the traditional reading and language arts classes to provide small group and individual instruction (pull-out support). The alternative education teachers then co-teach the remaining academic classes with the regular education teachers so that the students can be integrated with their peers (push-in support). More than 30 staff members in this intermediate school work with the alternative education students throughout the school year. The goal of an “in-house” alternative education program is to assist students with changing their behaviors in order to prevent placement in more restrictive, out-of-district facilities. All of the students in this program are regular education students, as students with Individualized Education Plans are not included in this alternative education group.

School 2F is an alternative education high school that provides behavioral support to students in Grades 9 through 12 from one school district. Fourteen staff members provide support to up to 150 students. Once students are recommended for placement at this alternative high school, they remain until they graduate and are not provided with an option to return to their home school. In addition to a credit recovery program that allows students to recover credits from failed or missed courses, this school provides academics using a team-based approach. This school also provides mental health services, drug and alcohol counseling, career education, after-school activities, and an alternative to suspension program for district students in Grades 8 and 9. This school also works closely with a probation officer and local law enforcement, as many of its students are currently involved with the juvenile justice system.

There are nine teachers providing support at School 3F for approximately 45 students. This program provides alternative education services to 65 public school districts in Pennsylvania. Students in Grades 7 through 12 may be referred to this program, which specializes in the treatment of students with the following needs: chronic absenteeism, persistent disregard for school authority, persistent violation of policy and procedures, violent acts directed toward staff and other students, use of controlled substances on school property, possession of a weapon on school property, serious misconduct in the classroom, and severe behavioral problems. A 1:5 staff to student ratio allows the staff to provide a structured learning environment with constant supervision. After-school programs are provided and students may also stay after school to make up work. The staff in this program will “search and rescue” students who fail to report to school. In addition to the academic

program, this school provides intensive day treatment, after school evening treatment programming, drug and alcohol counseling, specialized foster care, family systems counseling, and an adolescent boys group home.

### **Preparing for the Study**

There were two components to the study: First, the researcher interviewed the alternative school principal for approximately 60 minutes. Second, the staff in each alternative school completed the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (Appendix A). This is a 21-item survey that measured the teachers' perceptions of school climate. In addition, this researcher requested that each school leader provide 2008-2009 end-of-the-year data on attendance rates and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores. Due to the format of this data, no individual students were identified.

Prior to the fall of 2009, informal contacts were made with each leader involved in this study to verify interest in participation. Beginning in the fall of 2009, the principal and the superintendent of the alternative school to be studied were contacted by phone and formal permission was requested for the on-line survey to be distributed to the staff and a time for the personal interview was scheduled. In some cases, only the principal was contacted, as not all schools had a superintendent. Conversations with either the principal or superintendent included the dissemination of information regarding the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and the approval letter for a project involving human subjects from East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board (Appendix E). Once written authorization was received to conduct data collection within the district,

individual conversations were held via phone conference with each building principal to explain the specifics of the data collection procedures.

Due to the nature of this study and because this research includes human subjects as participants, approval from the Institutional Review Board was gained prior the commencement of the study. Letters were mailed to either the superintendent or principal of each school which explained the rationale and purpose of the study. The letter also formally requested permission to conduct the study (Appendix E). Additionally, building principals were initially contacted by phone and a follow-up letter, similar to that sent to the superintendents, was sent (Appendix E).

A letter of consent (Appendix F) was sent to each participant in this study, explaining that the research was being conducted as a doctoral study through Indiana University of Pennsylvania and East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. The letter clarified that participation was voluntary and that information gathered from observation, interviews and record collection would be kept confidential. Due to the nature of the participants in the study, identifying information was also kept confidential, meaning that names, when mentioned, were withheld.

## **Instrumentation**

### **Survey Instrument**

Three data sources were utilized during this study, including a staff survey, principal interview, and a review of records. The Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ) was designed by Bruce Johnson, Department Head of Teaching and Teacher Education, at the University of Arizona. Permission for use was obtained via e-mail

correspondence between Dr. Johnson and the researcher. The instrument is designed to measure a staff member's perception of school climate with regard to five specific themes, including collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation.

The Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire has established reliability and validity indicators. Several tests, including a confirmatory factor analysis, goodness-of-fit indices, structural equation modeling techniques, and analysis of variance indicated that the instrument does discriminate climate difference between schools. First used in 1982, this survey has been used nationally and internationally with several thousand participants. The original SLEQ consisted of 56 items, which considered student support, affiliation, professional interest, staff freedom, participatory decision making, innovation, resource adequacy and work pressure (Fraser, 1994; Fraser & Rentoul, 1982). Further internal consistency analysis led to the use of a revised, shortened version of the SLEQ called the Revised SLEQ, which arranges 35 items into five scales: collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation. Survey participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to respond to each of the statements based on their perceptions. Using an ordinal level of measurement, individuals responded to questions using the following values: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.*

## **Data Collection**

Staff were surveyed using an on-line survey tool. All participants utilized a log-in system requiring a username and password that was randomly generated. Data were password protected and was only accessed by the researcher. Staff indicated implied consent by submitting the survey once completed. A statement with regard to their consent was included at the beginning and end of the survey.

The second data collection component of the study was the principal interview. Although several guiding questions were predetermined for the principals' interviews, the tone of the conversation and responses generated led to additional questions, evaluations, and descriptions. Qualitative research (or "naturalistic inquiry") allows for the research questions and methods to be modified on the basis of information obtained in the course of data collection. This feature is referred to as the "constant comparison method" (Lincoln & Guba). The rationale for this notion is further addressed in chapter 4. The interview questions, as well as the protocol for the interview can be found in Appendix G.

This researcher interviewed each building principal involved in the study. The interview was conducted for the purpose of determining the principal's beliefs about leadership style, sex differences with regard to leadership, and specifically, differences with regard to the impact of leadership on the climate of alternative schools. These questions were designed through consultation with two building principals, an assistant superintendent, and three university professors in the education department for the purpose of aligning the questionnaire given to the staff with the specific questions asked of the administrators in order to triangulate the data. In addition, the questions are reflective of school climate

components. The questions, which were provided to the principals prior to the interview, were as follows:

1. How do you schedule time for content area teachers to collaborate and plan activities and lessons?
2. Do you see common planning time as beneficial? In what ways?
3. What strategies do your staff use to motivate “at-risk” students?
4. What resources are necessary to maintain a positive alternative school climate?
5. How do you seek input from teachers before making change or implementing new initiatives?
6. How do teachers bring new ideas to you? Describe the format or process by which they do this.
7. How do you utilize teacher input?
8. Describe your leadership style and indicate whether or not you feel there is a need for shared governance within your school’s structure.

A Dictaphone recording device was used for each interview. Principals signed an informed consent that indicated their knowledge of the recording and each session began with the subject acknowledging that he or she agreed to be recorded. Interviews were then transcribed for the purpose of coding and analysis. Specifically, common themes and language were extracted and examined.

The research also analyzed school data regarding attendance and standardized test scores, both of which are reportable to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and are considered public record. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has identified

attendance and standardized test scores as indicators of successful schools, specifically related to No Child Left Behind Legislation. No individual student data were examined and student data were not examined by subgroup. Data were reviewed in the context of empirical data review with regard to the sex of the leader of the specific alternative school. In most cases, this information was provided to the researcher at the time of the interview, though this data was also available through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In the remaining circumstances, information was provided via e-mail once the interview was completed. This information was included in a data review worksheet created by the researcher in order to look for and evaluate trends with regard to schools led by either male or female principals. Data were analyzed in whole and in part.

### **Participants**

The six alternative education principals that participated in this study were selected from schools within the boundaries of Colonial Intermediate Unit 20. The Intermediate Unit is an education service agency that provides support to schools in Northampton, Monroe, and Pike Counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The school districts within this area are often referred to as being “within the boundaries of Colonial Intermediate Unit 20”. Additionally, teaching staff from the six principals’ alternative schools participated in and assisted this researcher with data collection. Once the principal had agreed to participate, the data from that principal and school were included in the study. The alternative schools selected assist students with targeted “at risk” behaviors as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.



## **Data Analysis**

The methodological design of the study was quantitative and qualitative. Statistical procedures, including primarily inferential statistics, were used to analyze the survey data. Once the online surveys were complete, the R-SLEQ data were gathered via the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. Data from the surveys were imported into Excel spreadsheets and responses were analyzed. Means, standard deviations, and correlations provided the descriptive analyses, while several *t*-tests were used to conduct inferential analyses. The level of significance, *α*, for all statistical tests was set at .05, and all statistical analyses were conducted with the SPSS statistical program. Data were collected and analyzed in order to determine significance. Most of the major inferential statistics came from a general family of statistical models known as the General Linear Model. This includes the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), and the *t*-test. This researcher also examined data using measures of central tendency. Using the General Linear Model, the researcher also conducted a multivariate test using Pillai's Trace to determine significance. The Pillai's trace is a preliminary test to determine if it is valid to run other tests used to make statistical conclusions about the research questions. ANOVA is a commonly utilized inferential statistical procedure that can be used to test two or more sample means (Wiersma, 2000).

The *t*-test is one of the most common inferential statistics used in the educational and social sciences (Wiersma, 2000). *T*-tests were used to determine if significant differences exist between male and female leaders with regard to each of the school climate subsets.

Measures of central tendency, more specifically, ranking by means, were used to determine which major components and subsets of school climate were perceived to be the most/least important. This statistical technique simply involves calculating the means of a group of data and ranking them highest (most important) to lowest (least important) by their numerical value.

Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the study. This researcher reviewed the quantitative data, as well as the interviews and provided school data on attendance and standardized test scores. Key words and phrases were identified in categorizing the qualitative data in order to analyze common themes and distinctive meanings or interpretations.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Due to the nature of this study and because this research included human subjects as participants, approval from the Institutional Review Board was gained prior the commencement of the study. Letters were mailed to the superintendents of each alternative school which explained the rationale and purpose of the study. This letter also formally requested permission to conduct the study. Additionally, building principals were initially contacted by phone and then with a follow-up letter. Signed copies of the approval letters were forwarded to Dr. Davis, Chair of the East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board, and no activity took place until they were acknowledged by Institutional Review Board.

The follow-up letter of consent was generated and sent to each participant in this study, explaining that this research was being conducted as a doctoral study through Indiana

University of Pennsylvania and East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. Again, the letter clarified that participation was voluntary and that information gathered from observation, interviews, and data collection, was to be kept confidential. Although there was minimal risk to the participants of this study, it should be acknowledged that research bias may exist on some levels, particularly during the examination and interpretation of qualitative data. There is also the potential for bias in the interpretation of results, particularly since the researcher works in an alternative school setting and is passionate about the potential of such schools for helping at risk students. However, the methodology of qualitative research (or “naturalistic inquiry”, cf. Lincoln and Guba, 1985), capitalizes on such bias potential by emphasizing the importance of the investigator’s “theoretical sensitivity” to the data and the use of “idiographic interpretation” to make inductive and descriptive theoretical statements about the data. These features of qualitative research supplement and complement the quantitative data, as is appropriate to the mixed-methods design used in this study.

### **Summary**

The goal of this study was to explore the impact of a principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. In order to accomplish this goal, this researcher utilized a survey that was distributed to the staff at six alternative schools led by three males and three females in the Colonial Intermediate Unit 20. In addition, the principals at each school were interviewed and data specific to attendance and standardized test scores were collected. This data was analyzed separately, and then used as a whole, to further identify themes and answer the research questions as presented.

Mixed-methods research allowed the researcher to become immersed in a particular phenomenon. Through careful questioning, documentation, observation, and analysis of the research, the researcher was able to discern whether a link exists between a principal's sex and the climate of alternative schools.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

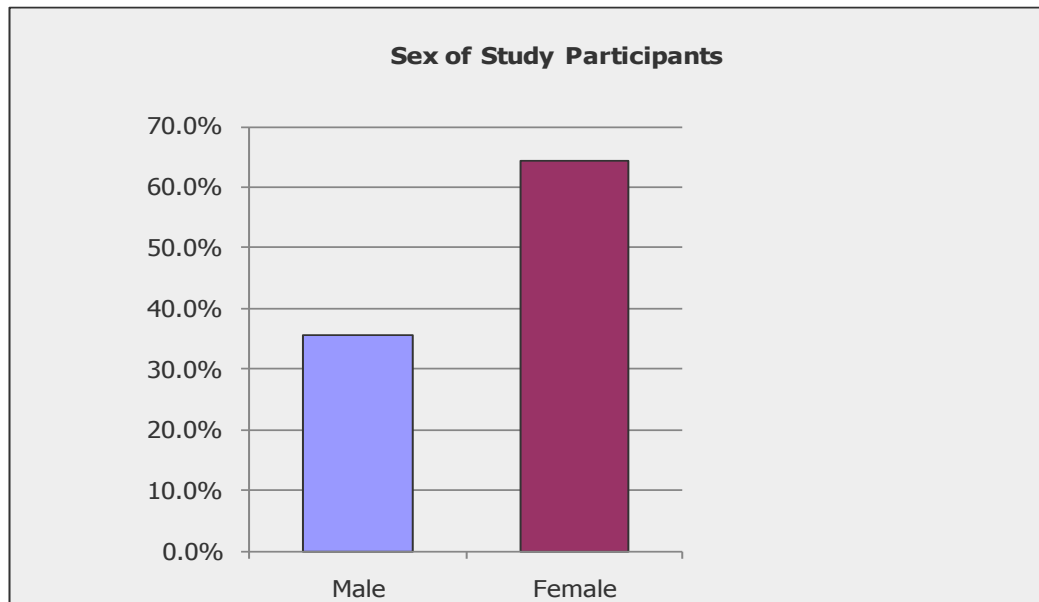
#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact, if any, of a principal's sex on the climate of alternative schools. Data from three sources, including principal interviews, a staff survey, and a review of school data were used to determine the impact of a principal's sex on alternative school climate. With regard to school climate, five subsets were analyzed that included collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation. These climate factors were taken primarily from the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ), which was discussed previously in chapter 2. Most specifically, the purpose of this study was to ascertain answers to the following research questions:

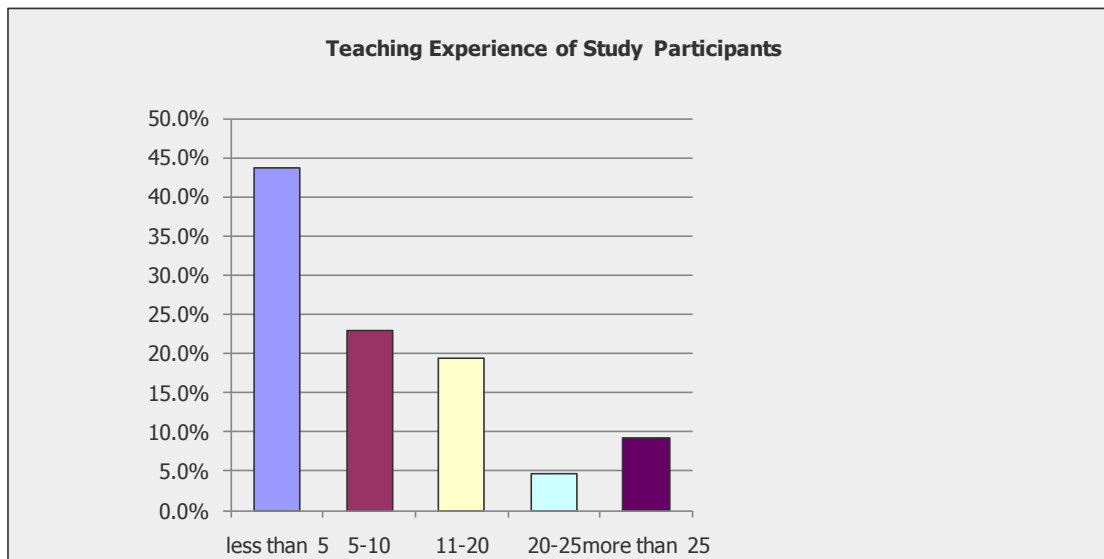
1. Do differences with regard to a principal's sex exist within the following subsets of alternative school climate: collaboration, student relations, alternative school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation?
2. To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff?
3. Based on the data, what themes emerge, based on the principal's sex, on the following alternative school profile characteristics: student attendance, student discipline, and academic performance?
4. What key factors regarding alternative school climate emerge as significant based on the results of this study?

### Characteristics of the Participants

The data used for this study, including the statistical analysis, were extracted from the survey responses of 88 alternative education teachers. Of the 88 teachers, 31 (35.6%) were males and 56 (64.4%) were females. One teacher did not respond to the demographic section of the survey, as well as the question regarding years of experience. In this case, 38 teachers indicated that they had fewer than 5 years experience. This represented 43.7% of the staff surveyed. Twenty teachers or 23% indicated that they had been teaching between 5-10 years, 17 teachers (19.5%) had been teaching 11-20 years, 4 teachers (4.6%) taught for 20-25 years, and 9.2%, or 8 teachers had 25 or more years of teaching experience. The following Figures 1 and 2 provide graphical representations of this demographic information.

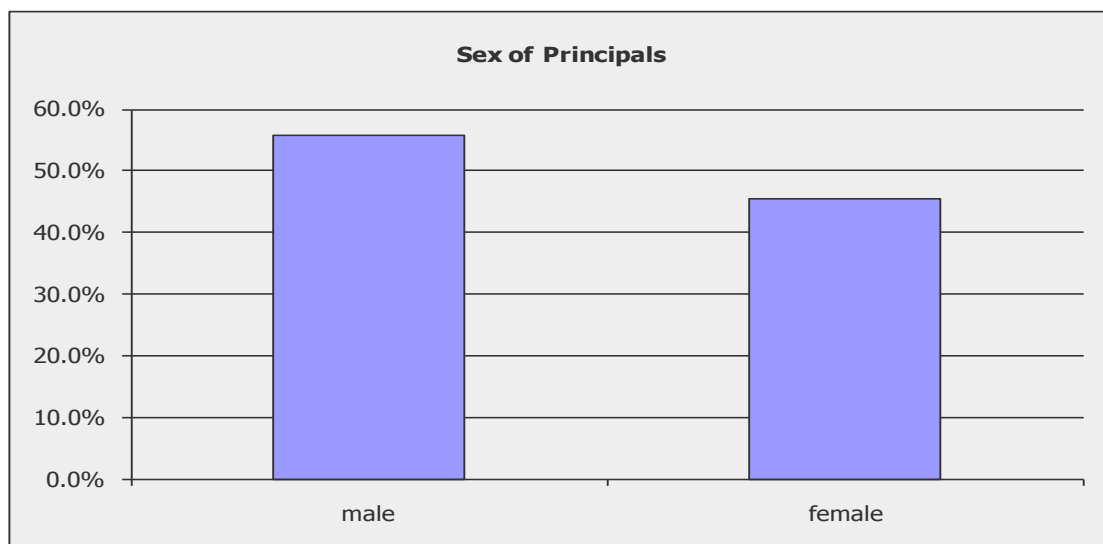


*Figure 1.* Percentage of study participants by sex.



*Figure 2.* Percentage of study participants by years of teaching experience.

Three female principals and three male principals participated in this study. Forty-nine teachers surveyed indicated that they work in a building led by a male and 40 teachers indicated led by a female. The following Figure 3 provides a graphical representation of this data.



*Figure 3.* Staff indication of principal's sex.

Once demographic information was obtained from participants in the study, surveyed staff indicated their beliefs about 21 statements regarding school climate on the questionnaire. These statements were representative of five school climate subsets. Table 1 provides an overview of these subsets for reader referencing purposes. Table 2 provides an overview of the mean scores for each subset of the SLEQ broken down by the sex of the principal. The total mean score for each subset is also provided since it was necessary to run a Pearson's correlation test on the mean scores for the total population.



Table 1

*Overview of School Climate Subsets as Presented in Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ)*

Question No.	Item
Collaboration	
1.	Teachers design instructional programs together.
6.	There is good communication among teachers.
11.	I have regular opportunities to work with other teachers.
16.	I seldom discuss the needs of individual students with other teachers.
20.	Classroom instruction is rarely coordinated across teachers.
21.	Good teamwork is not emphasized enough at my school.
Student Relations	
2.	Most students are well mannered or respectful of the school staff.
7.	Most students are helpful and cooperative with teachers.
12.	Students in this school are well behaved.
17.	Most students are motivated to learn.
School Resources	
3.	Instructional equipment is not consistently accessible.
8.	The school library has sufficient resources and materials.
13.	Video equipment, tapes, and films are readily available.
18.	The supply of equipment and resources is not adequate.
Decision Making	
4.	Teachers are frequently asked to participate in decisions.
9.	Decisions about the school are made by the principal.
14.	I have very little say in the running of this school.
Instructional Innovation	
5.	New and different ideas are always being tried out.
10.	New courses or curriculum materials are seldom implemented.
15.	We are willing to try new teaching approaches in my school.
19.	Teachers in this school are innovative.

Table 2

*Mean Scores Broken Down by Total Population and Sex*

Principal's sex	Mean
Collaboration—Male	4.10
Collaboration—Female	3.95
Total	4.08
Student relations—Male	3.11
Student relations—Female	3.44
Total	3.25
School resources—Male	2.85
School resources—Female	3.00
Total	2.91
Decision making—Male	3.65
Decision making—Female	3.64
Total	3.64
Instructional innovation—Male	3.71
Instructional innovation—Female	3.69
Total	3.70

*Note.* The first line for each variable represents the statistics for male principals and the second line for each variable represents statistics for female principals.

### Analysis of Survey Data

Survey data were gathered utilizing the on-line survey tool, SurveyMonkey™. All staff in the six alternative schools was e-mailed a survey link with a protected username and password. Data were collected via the on-line survey tool and transferred to an Excel spreadsheet in order to sort the results for analysis in SPSS. SPSS allowed this researcher to run several statistical analyses in order to answer the research questions. For the purpose of this study, variable names were created to more effectively describe the data sets. Those variable names and their descriptions are *P*Sex, which stands for Principal's Sex and *R*Sex, which stands for Respondent's Sex. Standard Deviation was abbreviated *SD*, and

occasionally the names of the school climate subsets were shortened for practicality within the tables. Prior to running data analysis in SPSS, negative statements were reversed in order for all Likert ratings to be similarly represented.

Prior to running statistical tests in SPSS, a data analysis procedure was determined that would assist the researcher in answering each question separately. For example, to answer question number 1, which asks if there are differences with regard to a principal's sex noted within the subsets of alternative school climate, inferential statistics and correlations were considered. After the Pearson correlation test was run in order to determine whether or not the questions were correlated to one another, a two-tailed significance test was completed and indicated that six out of ten correlations amongst subsets of questions were highly correlated. The questions pertaining to collaboration were highly correlated to all of the other subsets of questions, including decision making, school resources, student relations, and instructional innovation. In addition, student relations questions were highly correlated to school resources and instructional innovation.

Table 3 represents the descriptive statistics for each of the subsets of questions. The mean, standard deviation, and number of responses are included within the table. For example, the mean, or average, score for collaboration was 4.08, indicating that the staff primarily agrees that the principals are collaborative in their approach with regard to leadership. The average response for all questions pertaining to collaboration was 4.08, with a standard deviation of .545. Each of the remaining subsets, including decision making, school resources, student relations, and instructional innovation are also included.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Subsets of Questions*

Subset	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Collaboration	4.08	.545	87
Student Relations	3.25	.805	87
School Resources	2.91	.982	87
Decision Making	3.64	.564	87
Instructional Innovation	3.70	.391	87

Table 4 provides a visual representation of the correlations of all subsets of questions. This table indicates which subsets of questions are highly correlated to one another. Tests indicated that six of the subsets were positively correlated ( $p < .05$ ). Regardless of the sex of the principal, the respondents rated collaboration more positively than they rated decision making, student relations, instructional innovation and school resources at their schools. In addition, the student relations subset was positively correlated with school resources and instructional innovation. However, no significant correlation was found between respondents' ratings in student relations and decision making, nor between decision making and instructional innovation, nor between school resources and instructional innovation. Essentially, this indicates that it was necessary to consider a general linear model in order to run the inferential statistics with regard to the principal's sex.

Table 4

*Correlations Between Each of the Subsets of Questions*

	Collaboration	Student Relations	School Resources	Decision Making	Instructional Innovation
Collaboration	–	.34*	.38*	.49*	.41*
	–	.001	.000	.000	.000
Student Relations		–	.78*	.18	.23*
		–	.000	.105	.034
School Resources			–	.16	.16
			–	.131	.133
Decision Making				–	.19
				–	.073
Instructional Innovation					–
					–

*Note.* Sample size for all factors was 87; top row represents correlation coefficient; bottom row represents  $p$ -value; correlation \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Because the factors, or dependent variables, were highly correlated, a multivariate model was used to run inferential statistics with regard to principals' sex. Then, the Pillai's Trace test was done in order to test for differences between the dependent variable and the independent variable. Pillai's Trace is considered best in terms of statistical power. Table 5 represents descriptive statistics by principal's sex for each of the subsets of questions, and Table 6 details the results of the Pillai's Trace. The descriptive statistics included in Table 5 indicate the average score with each of the subsets of questions for both male and female principals. A total mean is also included for informational purposes. Although male principals' mean scores indicate an overall higher rating as compared to their female

counterparts within the descriptive statistics, significant differences are not evident until the Pillai's Trace is completed.

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics with Regard to Principal's Sex Including Standard Deviation*

Climate Factors	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Collaboration—Male	4.18	.507	4.03	4.34
Collaboration—Female	3.95	.572	3.78	4.13
Student relations—Male	3.11	.760	2.89	3.34
Student relations—Female	3.44	.832	3.19	3.70
School resources—Male	2.85	.911	2.56	3.14
School resources—Female	3.00	1.073	2.68	3.32
Decision making—Male	3.65	.560	3.49	3.81
Decision making—Female	3.64	.576	3.46	3.82
Instructional innovation—Male	3.71	.381	3.60	3.83
Instructional innovation—Female	3.69	.408	3.56	3.82

*Note.* The first line for each variable represents the statistics for male principals and the second line for each variable represents statistics for female principals.

Table 6

*Principal's Sex Pillai's Trace Test*

	Value	F-value	p-value	Obs. Pwr.
Principal's sex	.15	2.9 *	.019	.82

Note.  $p < .05$ .

The Pillai's Trace indicates that there is overall significance within one or more of the factors, and that independent *t*-tests can now be conducted on each of these factors. The *t*-tests were completed for testing the equality of means for each of the factors, and group statistics, by principal's sex, were determined for each subset of questions.

Table 7 details the results of the *t*-test for Equality of Means for each subset of questions, and indicates that significance was observed within the collaboration subset.

Table 7

*T-Test for Equality of Means*

Dependent Variable	df	F-value		
		p-value	t-score	p-value
Collaboration	85	.86 .355	2.000*	.049*
Student relations	85	.66 .417	-1.956	.054
School resources	85	.78 .377	-.671	.504
Instructional innovation	85	1.94 .166	.276	.783
Decision-making	85	.17 .678	.104	.918

Note. \*  $p < .05$ .

In order to answer the research question pertaining to overall school climate, data were analyzed for significant trends. A *t*-test was done for the combined subsets of questions. This test yielded no significance.

Table 8

*T-Test for Equality of Means for Overall School Climate of Alternative Schools*

School Climate	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> -value	Sig.	<i>t</i> -score	<i>p</i> -value
Alt. School Climate	84	2.44	.122	-1.521	.132

Group statistics were then extracted with regard to overall school climate and respondent sex. The mean for overall school climate for male respondents was 3.47 and the mean for female respondents was 3.63, indicating no significant difference. Table 9 provides a visual representation of these group statistics.

Table 9

*Group Statistics with Regard to Respondent's Sex and Overall School Climate*

Respondent's sex	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Male	31	3.47	.390
Female	55	3.63	.506

Finally, an analysis of variance test was run for between-subject dependent variables. Essentially, this was done to determine if there were differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff. The only significance found occurred in the Collaboration subset, and it was determined that both male and female



respondents rated male principals higher in this category. Table 10 describes this information.

Table 10

*Factorial Analyses of Variance for Survey Dependent Variables*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Collaboration			
Respondent Gender (R)	1	2.62	.11
Principal's Gender (P)	1	4.95*	.03
R x P	1	0.17	.68
Error	82	(0.29)	
Student Relations			
Respondent Gender (R)	1	0.75	.39
Principal's Gender (P)	1	2.72	.10
R x P	1	0.00	.95
Error	82	(0.64)	
School Resources			
Respondent Gender (R)	1	1.92	.17
Principal's Gender (P)	1	0.24	.62
R x P	1	0.16	.69
Error	82	(0.97)	
Decision Making			
Respondent Gender (R)	1	0.79	.37
Principal's Gender (P)	1	0.01	.92
R x P	1	0.23	.60
Error	82	(0.33)	
Error	82	(0.16)	

Table 10 (continued)

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Instructional Innovation			
Respondent Gender (R)	1	0.07	.79
Principal's Gender (P)	1	0.14	.71
R x P	1	0.56	.46
Error	82	(0.16)	

*Note.* *df* = degrees of freedom. Values in parentheses represent mean square errors. For Collaboration model  $R^2 = .08$ . For Student Relations model  $R^2 = .05$ . For School Resources model  $R^2 = .97$ . For Decision Making model  $R^2 = .33$ . For Instructional Innovation model  $R^2 = .16$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

### **Analysis of Interview Responses**

Analyzing interview results required this researcher to be a careful listener, recorder, and decoder. Each of the interviews was transcribed and recorded as 1F, 2F, or 3F, which represented the three female principals, and 1M, 2M, or 3M representing the three male principals. Once completed and transcribed, the researcher looked for individual themes, such as common language within each interview, then for commonalities among the males and then commonalities among the females. Differences, when appropriate, were noted, and an overall analysis was completed.

*Question 1: How do you schedule time for content area teachers to collaborate and plan activities and lessons?*

Principal 1F indicated that she schedules weekly team meetings. She attends the weekly meetings and facilitates a discussion about individual students, team concerns, and items that need to be addressed. Principal 2F also indicated that her building “teams” both students and teachers. Planning time is scheduled every day and it is built into the schedule. Because this is a non-traditional school, she had the flexibility when creating the school to design a schedule that best meets the needs of her staff and students. This freedom afforded her the unique opportunity to create a shorter school day for the students in order to give teachers more time for common planning. Although teaming does not occur in Principal 3F’s school due to its small size, planning time is built into the schedule and the entire faculty meets weekly.

Principal 1M indicated that teachers in his school have 30-45 minutes of planning time after school. This time is mostly used for discussions about students. Teaming does not occur at this school, again, because of the small size. Teaming does occur at Principal 2M’s

school. Teachers plan, together, once in a 6-day cycle. Teams have small group meetings in addition to a large group faculty meeting that occurs weekly. This is also the case at the final school led by principal 3M. In this school, time for collaboration and planning is scheduled every day. Teachers have prep periods built into their schedules just for this purpose. In addition, professional development is scheduled every Wednesday afternoon.

*Question 2: What strategies does your staff use to motivate “at-risk” students?*

The staff at Principal 1F’s school primarily uses an incentive based program. Teachers focus on self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-reflection. She feels strongly that the staff needs to influence students in a positive way and develop rewards and consequences that prepare students for the future. She also noted that discipline strategies are not effective for at-risk students. While Principal 2F was not as specific about the strategies as Principal 1F, she spoke openly about building relationships with students and the importance of students establishing a connection with their teachers. She believes that at-risk kids often feel hopeless and lack confidence in their abilities. Establishing personal connections, she stated, is in and of itself, motivational. Once the students feel comfortable with the teachers in her building, she observes a noticeable change in behavior, academic performance, and self-esteem. She also discussed specific, more tangible events that occur in her school that motivate students, including picnics, ice-cream socials, and activity periods. In addition, she encourages students to bring new ideas to her and to the teachers. For example, when a group of students mentioned an interest in music production, she and a teacher created a music production elective. The teacher brought his own equipment into school to use for the class, due to insufficient funding, and invited interested students to participate. This principal

mentioned that she has also created car maintenance classes for students in the past, again, based solely on student interest.

Principal 3F discussed the normative system that is used in her building to motivate at-risk students. This system is based on rewards for positive behavior and consequences for negative behavior. The primary incentive for students, in this case, is the possibility of returning to their home school, indicating that there is no longer a need for alternative education. The normative system focuses on levels, where students earn points. In addition, this school relies heavily on parent contact to motivate students.

In contrast, Principal 1M discussed the elimination of consequences in his interview. While he agreed that consequences work for some students, he believes, that his students have become at-risk for failure because traditional systems have failed to work for this particular group of kids. Instead, he indicated that his staff uses a “softer” approach with the children. Rather than punishing kids, they may limit incentives, but the staff recognizes that past practices have not worked for the students, and they work to develop new strategies for motivating them, even if it means developing new programs and incentives for individual students. Principal 2M discussed a similar program. His staff uses a sanctuary model, which emphasizes student safety and adult responsibility. Most kids that are misbehaving in his school, he said, have experienced some sort of trauma in their life. Once they become trusting of adults, they form a mutual regard and respect. This is when they notice a change in their students and find that they are most easily able to motivate them.

During the interview with Principal 3M, he indicated that the entire school and its mission are based on the concept of motivating at-risk students. He indicated that the goal of

his program is to make school the best place that kids can be during the day. It is important for school to be exciting, engaging, and fun. Several incentive programs are in place to assist him in creating this system. Students use a point system each day and can earn points each period of the day. Teachers are taught only to use positive statements in the classroom and to focus on clear expectations. The goal is never to punish kids. Weekly award ceremonies occur, and children can earn multiple awards.

*Question 3: What resources are necessary to maintain a positive alternative school climate?*

Principal 1F indicated that funds are a primary resource necessary to maintain a positive school climate. Funds are utilized to promote incentive-based field trips and activities. In addition, her staff notes positive benefits of scheduling non-traditional trips and activities, which often include hiking and participating in a ropes course. Funding is vital to making this type of programming possible.

Principal 2F talked differently than Principal 1F about resources. The most effective and important resource, for her staff and students, is separation from the traditional setting. She feels that this is necessary to work with at-risk kids and assist in establishing relationships. Beyond that, common planning time and staff are crucial resources. She indicated that with the right staff, the program will “run itself.”

For Principal 3F, staff was also noted as a key resource. “When we’re hiring, we make sure that we’re hiring the right staff to meet our at-risk kids’ needs.” In addition, funds for the behavior modification system were viewed as important by both her and her staff.

“Incentives and resources are important resources” according to Principal 1M. In addition to matching the sending school’s curriculum for students, this school provides

incentives that require funding. Students participate in monthly incentive trips, which include outdoor adventure challenges and weekend trips. Having the chance to provide this type of opportunity for the students, he said, helps them in the classroom. The incentives used at this school are believed to promote teamwork and collaboration and also promote positive relationships between the staff and students.

Principal 2M indicated that staff is his most important resource. Maintaining an appropriate number of staff is necessary, he said, when you are dealing with unpredictable students. He also commented on the need for training. Principal 3M also said that the most valuable resource an administrator can provide is training for his or her staff. Time to train is “probably the greatest resource.” The need for financial resources, he revealed, is minimal at his school. The cost to run the program is relatively inexpensive, he said; however, personnel resources with regard to staff and training are most valuable.

*Question 4: How do you seek input from teachers before making change or implementing new initiatives?*

Teachers in Principal 1F’s school use a collaborative approach to school discussions. New ideas are discussed at team meetings and in faculty meetings. This principal works with an assistant principal in her school and she indicated that both she and her assistant are open to new ideas and feel that the staff is comfortable approaching them. In addition, they do a needs assessment survey at the beginning and middle of the school year in order to determine the effectiveness of programming.

Principal 2F also talked about a collaborative approach for implementing new ideas. “Anything we do here is almost completely teacher driven. They come up with the need for change as often as I do.” She credits the reason why teachers stay in her building as this

collaboration that they have established. According to Principal 2F, teachers are not afraid to speak up, talk about problems, or discuss solutions.

Principal 3F also reiterated the importance of discussion at her staff meetings. Both administration and staff are very vocal about what works and what does not in her school. Although the school is small, she feels that they benefit because there is more opportunity for a lot of informal contact.

All male principals indicated similar responses. Faculty meetings provide teachers an opportunity to share ideas and provide input. In addition, the male principals, like their female counterparts, benefit from ongoing informal sharing outside of scheduled meetings.

*Question 5: How do teachers bring new ideas to you? Describe the process by which they do this.*

Team meetings were the primary means by which teachers bring new ideas to Principal 1F. Teachers in this school are also encouraged to discuss problems and concerns openly in order to facilitate discussions about positive change. Principals 2F and 3F also discussed the team meeting format as the process by which teachers initiate new ideas. However, because traditional alternative schools are typically smaller, as in this case, teachers are just as likely to bring new ideas to them in informal sessions and unscheduled meetings.

Principal 1M also discussed the informal process by which teachers discuss new ideas. For example, he mentioned that a teacher met him in the hallway and mentioned that the kids would benefit from a Driver's Education course. That chance encounter and quick discussion led to a more detailed discussion at a later date, and ultimately, the creation of the course.



While most of the whole staff meetings at Principal 2M's school involve celebrations of success, teachers are free to suggest new ideas. Like the other schools, the relatively informal setting allows for teachers to bring new ideas to this principal casually. The same holds true for the school led by Principal 3M.

*Question 6: How do you utilize teacher input?*

The female administrator at school 1F presents new ideas that are brought to her attention to the entire staff. She indicated that if a new idea is presented, and most of the staff is in agreement, they are willing to try the new idea and examine its effectiveness.

Principals 2F and 3F indicated that they are open to new ideas and suggestions. The size of the staff and low numbers of students allow for daily discussions and flexibility with regard to change and implementing new ideas. Principal 2F indicated that she is careful to check policy and often verifies suggestions with her superiors before making final decisions. She did mention, however, that generally input from teachers is welcomed, accepted, and ultimately, their ideas are implemented whenever possible.

Principal 1M said that he is willing to try new ideas. When teachers bring new ideas to the table with regard to programming or academics, he speaks with his director for final approval and moves quickly to implement programs. He said, "It's all about new ideas and changes that are good for kids." He believes that it is his job as principal to instill a sense of ownership in his teachers and assure them that he is willing to try new things. Principal 2M concurred. Again, little happens in his building without teacher input. He thinks that he accepts and utilizes teacher input on a regular, consistent basis. Likewise, Principal 3M uses teacher input regularly, and empowers all of his teachers to be actively involved in the

decision-making process. By recognizing teachers' ideas and bringing them "to life," said Principal 3M, "teachers see that their actions become as important as their ideas, essentially, because they are the creators of new initiatives and programs."

*Question 7: Describe your leadership style and indicate whether or not you feel there is a need for shared governance within your school's structure.*

It was most interesting for this researcher to discuss leadership style with each of the principals. Their individual responses to the questions led the researcher to believe that there may be more similarities than differences between these leaders, despite their sex differences. Each of the leaders seemed to enjoy talking about their leadership style and describing it in their own words. Principal 1F indicated that she believes in collaborative decision making and shared responsibility. She is a leader that believes in these things and she empowers her teachers to do the same. Principal 2F said that her leadership style is "totally shared governance." She said that sometimes her style varies, depending on the person that she is working with. However, shared governance encompasses everything that she does at her school. Principal 3F also indicated that she "absolutely feels that there is a need for shared governance." She leads by example, has an open door policy, and does not expect anything from her staff that she would not do herself.

The male principals also emphasized collaboration in their responses. Principal 1M said that he is a leader that is not harsh, is easy going, easy to talk to, and that he enjoys working with his staff. "I'm here for the kids," he said. "I want them to know that I'm here for them because I believe in second chances." When asked about shared governance, Principal 3M said, "That is my leadership style; shared governance." Principal 2M said that the sanctuary model of reaching kids at his alternative school relies on shared governance.

He concluded by stating that he could sum up his leadership style in one sentence. Once given the “OK”, he stated, “The person who sweeps the floor should pick the broom.”

### **Themes in Interviews**

In analyzing the interviews, specific themes with regard to school climate were examined. The themes, which were extracted from the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire, were categorized into the following subsets: Collaboration, Student Relations, School Resources, Decision Making, and Instructional Innovation. In addition, leadership style was reviewed and compared. This researcher noted very few differences within any of the school climate subsets.

#### **Collaboration**

All six principals discussed the benefits of collaboration and common planning time. Daily and/or weekly team meetings occur in all of the buildings that allow for teaming. Common planning time is seen as a necessity and discussions often occur during non-structured meeting times, in the hallways, during informal conversations, or outside of the school day. Again, noticeable differences between the opinions of male and female leaders were not identified.

#### **Student Relations**

This researcher noted that male principals were more likely to take a non-disciplinary approach with the students. All three female principals discussed discipline, in some form and consequences are issued in their schools. However, it is important to note that, despite this, the female principals did emphasize that creating a positive atmosphere where relationships can be enhanced, is essential.

The male principals that participated in this study also talked about relationships and cohesiveness amongst staff and students, but they did not speak about disciplinary consequences. Instead, their responses to the interview questions indicated that disciplinary consequences are not issued. This researcher found that consequences are issued more frequently in schools led by female principals. For example, Principal 1M stated that his school has eliminated all punishments. A softer approach is used, as compared to Principal 3F's school, where her normative system works with rewards and consequences as a means to motivate students academically and behaviorally. Principal 2M's sanctuary model emphasizes student safety and adult responsibility. It is a system built on trust and mutual regard. Although consequences are not issued, negative behaviors are acknowledged and students do take responsibility for their actions through discussion and therapy. Principal 3M stressed that he wants school to be the best place that students can be during the day. Students work with a point system and only positive behaviors are emphasized. In addition, only positive statements are made to the students. His staff is trained to avoid all negative statements and interactions. In addition, both Principals 2M and 3M talked about weekly award assemblies and staff celebrations.

### **School Resources**

In this factor of school resources, differences between and among male and female principals were not noteworthy. Similarities and differences were noted in both male and female principals' ideas with regard to school funding. Principals 1F, 3F, 1M, and 3M all talked specifically about monetary resources for incentive-based programming. Principals 2F, 3F, and 2M all indicated that staff is a fundamental resource when it comes to alternative

school programming. With that, according to Principal 3M, funding for professional development and training is necessary.

### **Decision Making**

All six principals, both male and female, indicated that very little happens in their school without teacher input. In fact, this researcher observed that, according to the principals, most of the change that occurs within the schools happens because of staff input. The principals of these schools feel strongly that their staff has some ownership in the decision-making processes of the school. Whether through informal discussions, discussions at scheduled staff meetings, team meetings, or committees of teachers meeting together, staff members in these small schools have a say. “Many hands make little work,” said Principal 3M.

### **Instructional Innovation**

Instructional innovation is an important element of alternative education. Students who attend alternative schools have shown that they are unable to meet with success in traditional schools. It is somewhat “understood” that instructional planning is innovative and designed or changed to meet the needs of the students that attend the school. All six principals indicated that their staff is given flexibility in order to be innovative with regard to instructional planning. Principal 1F, for example, stated that she is more open to accepting teachers’ ideas if they are innovative and meaningful. She indicated that she is always open to new ideas. Likewise, Principal 3F stated that she is appreciative of staff that implements new ideas. Several principals, including Principal 2F, 1M, and 2M all spoke about programs or courses that have been added to their curriculum because of innovative ideas brought to

them from teachers. Evidence from all six principal interviews suggests that instructional innovation consistently occurs in all six alternative schools.

### **Leadership Style**

Similarities were noted with regard to leadership style for all six principals. Each of the principals discussed collaboration, shared governance, and leading with a “hands on” approach. Differences with regard to leadership style did not stand out between males and females, or within the entire group. More similarities were noted than differences. This group of principals appears to believe strongly in shared governance within their schools. Principals 1F, 2F, 2M, and 3M all discussed shared governance specifically.

### **Review of School Data**

Data, including average daily attendance and PSSA scores were gathered and some differences were observed in this data. This researcher looked for patterns in attendance and standardized test scores (see Table 11).

Table 11

*Overview of Alternative School Attendance and Standardized Test Scores Data*

Principal	No. of staff	Student Attendance	PSSA Prof
1F	31	91%	52%
2F	14	84%	59%
3F	9	84%	18%
<i>Average</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>86.3%</i>	<i>43%</i>
1M	6	79%	11%
2M	23	87%	.30%
3M	27	82%	36%
<i>Average</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>82.6%</i>	<i>16%</i>

**Results of Study****Research Question 1**

*Do differences with regard to a principal's sex exist within the following subsets of alternative school climate: collaboration, student relations, alternative school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation?*

Differences with regard to respondents' mean ratings on collaboration for male and female principals were noted in the questionnaire data, while sex differences in principals' attitudes about student relations and the use of discipline were noted within the interviews. The statistical data for collaboration indicated a significant difference in respondents' ratings of male and female principals. That is, male principals were rated higher than female

principals in collaboration. Inferential statistics on the subset of collaboration questions indicated that some of the data were statistically significant within the group. The mean, 95% confidence interval for mean (lower bound and upper bound), variance, and standard deviation were all considered for each question. Table 12 details the questions within the subset of collaboration.

Table 12

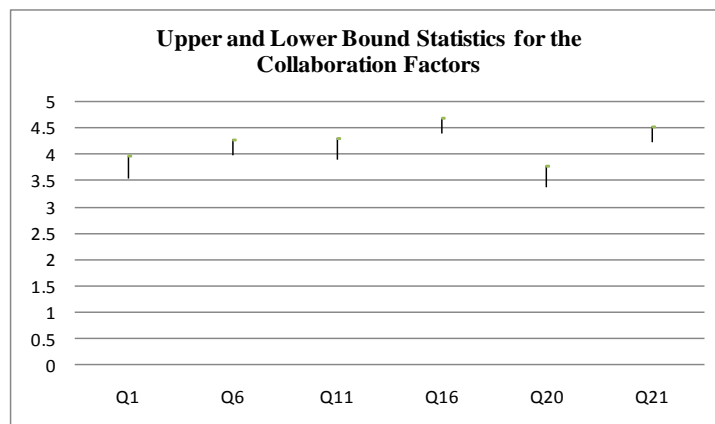
*Subset Collaboration Questions*

Question No.	Item
Collaboration	
1.	Teachers design instructional programs together.
6.	There is good communication among teachers.
11.	I have regular opportunities to work with other teachers.
16.	I seldom discuss the needs of individual students with other teachers.
20.	Classroom instruction is rarely coordinated across teachers.
21.	Good teamwork is not emphasized enough at my school.

The lower bound and upper bound statistics describe the range of the mean in 95% of the cases. For example, for Question 1, the lower bound statistic was 3.55 and the upper bound statistic was 3.97; 95% of the responses for Question 1 fell within this range. When asked if teachers design instructional programs together, the respondents indicated an overall “agree” response, which was indicated by the 3.76 mean.



The lower bound and upper bound statistics for Question 6 were 3.99 and 4.28. The mean, 4.14, indicates that the teachers agree that there is good communication amongst teachers. Similarly, the 95% confidence interval for mean for Question 11, indicate that teachers feel that they have time to collaborate with one another. There was, however, a significant difference between Question 11 and Question 16, which is visually represented by bounds that do not “overlap”. Table 13 reports the 95% confidence interval for each of the items in the collaboration subset. When the range reported for an item does not overlap with the range reported for another item, the conclusion warranted is that there is a difference between the items. Recall that, the Likert scale items stated in the negative were recalculated to permit comparisons. Although presented as a negative statement in the questionnaire, Question 20 had an overall mean of 3.57 and Question 21 proved to be significantly different only to Questions 1 and 20. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the upper and lower bounds for this subset of factors.



*Figure 4.* Upper and lower bound statistics for the collaboration factors.

Table 13

*Summary Statistics for the Collaboration Factors*

Question No.	Mean	SD	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	3.76	1.000	3.55	3.97
6	4.14	.685	3.99	4.28
11	4.10	.903	3.91	4.30
16	4.54	.643	4.40	4.68
20	3.57	.960	3.37	3.78
21	4.38	.703	4.23	4.53

Interview data did not indicate a difference between schools with regard to collaboration amongst teachers. In fact, all principals indicated that they believe collaboration to be an essential component of the alternative school climate. However, interview data did indicate a difference with regard to student relations. Differences were noted within both sex categories, specifically with regard to student discipline and motivation and school data. The male principals within this study tend not to issue consequences. Motivation is not based on consequences, but rather rewards. This researcher noted that male principals were more likely to take a non-disciplinary approach with the students. All three female principals discussed discipline, in some form and consequences are issued in their schools.

A review of school data indicated that students in schools led by female principals attend school more often, 86.3% of the time as compared to students that attend schools led by males (57.4%). A review of academic data, which included standardized PSSA scores,

also indicated a difference in overall proficiency in female led schools (43% proficient) as compared to male led schools (15.8% proficient).

### **Research Question 2**

*To what extent, if any, are there differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff?*

As indicated in Table 9, no significant differences within the perceived climate of the alternative school with regard to the respondent's sex were noted. Based on the data, there are no differences in the perceived climate of the alternative school based on the sex of the surveyed staff.

### **Research Question 3**

*Based on the data, what themes emerge, based on the principal's sex, on the following alternative school profile characteristics: student attendance and academic performance?*

Please refer to Table 11, which indicates differences with regard to student attendance and academic performance emerge.

Again, a review of school data indicated that students in schools led by female principals attend school more often, with an overall average daily attendance percentage of 86.3% as compared to students that attend schools led by males (82.6% average daily attendance). A review of academic data, which included standardized PSSA scores, also indicated a difference in overall proficiency in female led schools (43% proficient) as compared to male led schools (15.8% proficient). Although this chart does not detail information on discipline, information gained from the principal interviews suggests that

discipline is handled differently at the different schools. As discussed previously, this data indicated that disciplinary consequences are not issued in the schools with male leaders. Therefore, it was not possible for this researcher to gather numerical data with regard to discipline.

#### **Research Question 4**

*What key factors regarding alternative school climate emerge as significant based on the results of this study?*

As stated previously, the results of the data with regard to the subset of collaboration within the questionnaire emerge as significant. Student relations differences were noted within the interview data as indicated by the male and female principals' different attitudes toward discipline and what it takes to motivate students. In general, male principals tended not to use discipline or negative consequences to motivate their students. In general, students' performance on standardized tests, as well as attendance, was higher in the schools led by female principals. Additional discussion, interpretation, and summary of the study's findings can be found in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not a principal's sex impacted the climate of alternative schools. A review of literature revealed that sex differences may exist with regard to leadership. The literature review revealed several different philosophies regarding sex differences in leadership. These philosophies focused on leadership traits and descriptions of leadership types. Leadership traits were categorized according to masculine and feminine traits and commonalities were noted that were discussed within studies and journal articles. In addition, Moos' (1979) three general human relationship themes, including relationships with others, personal growth, and system maintenance were the basis for the school climate factors examined, which included collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation. This study examined whether or not a connection could be made between these climate factors, the impact that they have on alternative schools, and the sex of the alternative school principal.

This research focused primarily on masculine and feminine leadership traits, which were discussed in the literature as being related to either men or women. Although associated with men and women, this researcher found that leadership traits are attributed as either masculine or feminine, despite the leader's sex. For example, leaders who exhibit masculine leadership qualities tend to emphasize goal-setting and assertiveness. They tend to be controlling, aggressive, ambitious, dominating, independent, self-reliant, self-sufficient, direct, and decisive. (Gibson, 1995, Eagley, 1987, & Rosner, 1990). Rosner (1990),

discussed this leadership role as being a series of transactions with subordinates in which rewards are exchanged for services and punishment is exchanged for inadequate performance. Masculine leadership traits, which are stereotypically associated with men and not with women, are viewed from a biological perspective, meaning they are traits that are often characteristic of a man. Men, as Kruger's (1996) study suggested, spend more time on administrative tasks and external contacts than do females. Connor (1992) believed that the key difference in male and female leadership styles was that men lead through concrete exchanges. Desjardins (1985) concluded that men, when compared to women, excel in self-esteem, self-confidence, enjoy a challenge, have more self-control, are more involved in change, and are more committed to community service.

Descriptions of female leadership qualities revealed a different set of strengths. Although Bass (1990) could not find a clear pattern of differences in leadership behaviors, he did note some differences in women, including that they are more charismatic leaders and they temper criticism with positive feedback. Gibson (1995), who stated that men emphasize goal setting, believed that women emphasize interaction, facilitation, and dimension. Gibson's description of female leadership traits, which are communal as compared to the male's agentic qualities, concluded that women's leadership traits include nurturance, affection, ability to devote self to others, eagerness to soothe hurt feelings, helpfulness, sympathy, awareness of the feelings of others, and emotional expressiveness. Research completed in 1990 by Eagley and Johnson paralleled this description, claiming that women emphasize both interpersonal relations and task accomplishment. Women, according to their

research, adopt a more democratic style than men. It should be noted that these female “leadership” traits do not differ from traits of femininity in United States culture.

Rosner (1990), who described male leadership as a series of leader-subordinate interactions, believes that women encourage participation, share power, energize, and enhance self-worth of others. And Kruger (1996), who found no differences with respect to decision making and power, did note differences with respect to women being more oriented toward pedagogical tasks, and spending more time on internal communication within the work place. Ultimately, the literature suggests that women are more communication oriented and more likely to care about individuals rather than tasks.

It is important to note that several studies found no sex differences in leadership styles, both overall, and with respect to individual qualities such as motivation, self-esteem, and mental ability (Van Engen, van der Leeden, & Williamson, 2001; Miner, 1974; Morrison & Sebald, 1974). For the purpose of this research and its findings, the leadership traits identified have been categorized as either masculine or feminine. The school leaders that participated in this study, although both male and female, all exhibited leadership traits that would be considered feminine.

The literature review also focused on women as school administrators. This review discussed the distinct styles of women as leaders of schools. While there were some comparisons made between male and female leadership styles, this emerging literature base reported on the specific styles of women school leaders.

Leadership styles and characteristics of women school administrators also emerged as a theme in the literature. Some studies suggested that a leader’s sex plays little or no role in

an administrator's effectiveness as long as the principal is viewed as efficient and successful. In fact, some studies suggested that leadership styles may differ little and that sex is not as important as role in leadership behaviors (Mertz & McNeely, 1995). Mertz and McNeely, in a 1993 study of aspiring and practicing administrators, stated that "practicing administrators were defined by the similarity of their responses to common situations (what they do), rather than by their sex, school level, or Myers-Briggs type" (p. 20). Interestingly, Porat's (1991) research suggests that individuals who possess and exhibit feminine modes of leadership, despite sex, are more effective as administrators. Therefore, sex becomes less important than masculine versus feminine traits. "Research evidence strongly suggests that good school administration is more attuned to feminine than masculine modes of leadership behavior" (Porat, 1991, p. 413). This research supports this theory, as all 6 principals are viewed as effective leaders with regard to school climate, and all exhibit qualities of leadership considered feminine.

The literature also supported the notion that women spend more time communicating with people, paying careful attention to individual differences. They are more influential in matters of instructional learning and teaching methods, and they are more involved with staff, students, and the community. Essentially, despite the feeling of having to relate to and work as well as men, women are more likely to show consistency in both the public sphere of work and in the private sphere of home and family (Shakeshaft, 1987). Berman (1982) has reported similar findings. Women had a higher percentage of contacts that were identified by others, indicating more interaction with those around them. Women report coming into contact with others more, indicating more relational interaction. In addition, women report:



1. Shorter desk work sessions during the school day and more time spent during after school hours.
2. A higher percentage of total contacts with superiors.
3. Longer average duration for scheduled meetings, phone calls, and unscheduled meetings.
4. Cooperative planning more often taking place during scheduled meetings. (p. 2)

Other literature suggests that the differences in leadership styles of men and women may be dwindling (Barber & Daly, 1996; Mertz & McNeely, 1997). Reductions in sex role differentiation, sex discrimination, and segregation have been decreasing, which have lessened the differences in perceived leadership styles of males and females. Although this reduction is discussed throughout the literature, the common perception that male and females lead differently still persists.

Also noteworthy within the literature review were articles and findings leading to the creation of the survey tool for this study, the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire. Of particular interest, was the framework for which the school climate factors emerged for this research tool. Using Moos' framework, which includes relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance, the climate survey was created and it identified 5 key components of school climate that fall within Moos' framework. They include collaboration, student relations, school resources, decision making, and instructional innovation. This research focused on whether a principal's sex had an impact on these subsets, independently, or collectively, as a whole.

While the research on sex differences specifically with respect to leadership exists in various forms and sources, there remains a gap in specific research regarding the effect of a principal's sex on the school climate of alternative schools. Alternative Education is not a widely studied phenomenon. Beyond that, the leadership of these schools is often overlooked in the research because the studies that exist focus primarily on the students or specific programs. This researcher was most interested in determining whether or not alternative schools are influenced by the leader, and whether or not the sex of the leader plays a particular role in the climate of the building among students and staff. And, while the research could easily be found on leadership styles, sex differences, and school climate, this researcher had not successfully located current research that linked sex differences, leadership styles, school climate, and alternative schools.

### **Summary and Interpretation of Findings**

This researcher found that there were few differences observed amongst the leaders with regard to sex. Similarities were noted in both the female principals' and male principals' leadership styles. It is the conclusion of this researcher that both groups of leaders exhibited characteristics that included shared governance, collaboration, shared decision making, and a belief that the best school resources begin with staff. This researcher also sensed a genuine concern for the students of the alternative school. Despite "red tape" and budgetary concerns, each of the leaders talked about providing programming that best meets the needs of their students, often at the suggestion of the students and staff. These leaders, both male and female, also believe in common planning time, time to meet and share concerns, and all of

the leaders agreed that they make decisions based on the staff's perception of a need for change.

Interestingly, the research conducted through the interview process revealed one particular difference between male and female leaders within the student relations subset. Male leaders were less likely to issue consequences and use punishments to motivate alternative education students. To the contrary, female principals each talked about consequences or negative punishments in their interviews. Also, within the student relations category students in schools led by females had higher standardized test scores and higher average daily attendance.

Statistically, significance with regard to collaboration was noted within the staff survey. This significance was discussed in chapter 4, as collaboration included questions pertaining to teachers designing instructional programs together, good communication among teachers, regular opportunities for staff to interact, time to discuss student needs, collaborative classroom instruction, and teamwork. Although the survey data suggested that the staff rate male principals better on collaboration, the interviews with principals revealed that both male and female principals provide time for all of the aforementioned activities. For this reason, it is important to understand the limitations of teaching and leading in an alternative school.

### **Limitations**

In order to fully understand the findings of this study and determine whether or not they are significant, it is important to understand the parameters of teaching and leading in an alternative school. In this case, there are many. Studying alternative schools comes with

inherent risks, as they are “non-traditional” as compared to other schools, both public and private. These schools were created to work with a population of students that has not met with success in traditional programs. Often, these students have been unsuccessful because of behavior, academics, attendance, drug and alcohol abuse, or special education needs that interfere with behavior to a degree that requires removal from school. Therefore, examining this type of school using traditional means, is limiting in and of itself. School climate measures and research have primarily been used in traditional school settings. Similarly, examining leaders and leadership roles has also occurred within traditional educational settings. This also limits the effectiveness of researching a group of alternative school leaders and making comparisons based on their more “traditional” counterparts.

Understanding that most alternative schools are significantly smaller and more underfunded than traditional public and private schools also assists the reader in understanding the limitations of this study. While some schools had as many as 31 teachers, other schools had as few as 6 or 9 teachers and a small student-to-teacher ratio. The size of some larger schools naturally lends itself to teaming and collaborative planning, while the smaller size of other schools makes it more challenging, logistically. Despite all of the principals, both male and female, discussing the need for collaboration and planning, those principals of smaller schools also discussed the difficulty in making it happen. This is also the case because of the non-traditional scheduling that happens in many buildings. Many alternative schools rely on their students being transported by the sending school transportation system. This, at times, means that students work within a shorter school day than their peers in traditional educational settings.

Lastly, with regard to limitations, it is important to understand the characteristics of alternative education students. This study focused on the alternative schools for disruptive youth. The Pennsylvania Department of Education defines alternative education as “removes disruptive students from regular school programs in order to provide those students with a sound educational course of study and counseling designed to modify disruptive behavior and return to a regular curriculum.” Therefore, alternative education students present specific behavioral challenges that are not necessarily observed in traditional secondary schools.

Attempts to understand the performance of alternative school students, using traditional means such as academic achievement (e.g., scores on the PSSA), behavior (e.g., number of times discipline is issued), and attendance (e.g., percentage of days in school), is inherently limiting because of the students’ histories of behavioral and academic difficulties. The principals in the buildings studied would all agree that attendance and test scores are important; however, they prioritize these subsets differently than other principals. In some cases, a student “showing up” to take a test is more important than the result. In other cases, working toward improving a student’s attendance from 40% to 80% is significant, despite the fact that this statistical percentage falls well below the state’s expectation for average daily attendance.

This study utilized traditional means by which to study and examine school climate, primarily because non-traditional means to study this phenomena were not located. This factor, coupled with the inherent limitations of alternative education led to a realization that much additional research is needed in this area in order to establish norms and parameters for the study of alternative schools and their leaders.

## **Implications**

It is the conclusion of this researcher that the identified limitations of this study may ultimately skew the statistics of this research and may not necessarily be generalizable to alternative school climate. Although specific differences with regard to sex were not observed, it is possible that differences with regard to principals, in general, may have been observed. The climate of the alternative schools studied as a whole, were rated very positive, with the exception of the school resources subset, which rated low (mean = 2.9195). Based on the limited funding sources associated with alternative schools, it was not surprising that the school resources subset rated low. This particular category included questions specific to library resources, video resources, and readily available instructional materials.

As stated previously, it was observed that the male and female principals in this study had more similar leadership qualities than differences. As the literature suggested, this study revealed a confirmed number of positive feminine qualities within both groups of leaders. The leaders, overall, were caring, genuinely open to suggestions and feedback, deeply concerned about the staff and students in their building, collaborative, and enjoyed shared governance within their school. All six leaders discussed the idea of spending little time at their desks completing administrative tasks, and being primarily concerned with the overall atmosphere and climate of their schools, despite having to work with and motivate a staff that is responsible for educating a very challenging population of students.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Several ideas for further research emerged throughout the completion of this study. As noted previously, school climate has primarily been studied in traditional school settings. Because of this, climate surveys have been developed based on traditional norms and experiences. The survey tool used in this study was no exception, in that it looked at school climate with regard to collaboration, decision making, school resources, student relations, and instructional innovation in traditional schools. When looked at individually or as a whole, this survey should give the researcher a clear picture of a school's climate. It has, after all, been used extensively and proven reliable and valid. It is the conclusion of this researcher, however, that more research is needed within the area of alternative education. Alternative education schools must be examined more carefully, through case study and multiple case study analysis. Then a set of norms and values with regard to this non-traditional form of education must be determined. Then, perhaps a more suitable tool for identifying school climate factors could be developed and used exclusively for alternative education settings. For example, it may be determined that positive alternative school climate is based more on the means by which teachers and principals make improvements in academics, attendance, and behavior. Perhaps, a school climate survey could be developed that focuses on strategies used to engage and support struggling students. If the perception exists that a positive school climate indicates that a school is successful, it would be for the staff and students at these unique schools to determine how to qualify "success".

Additionally, this research focused on the sex of the principals of alternative schools and the researcher was looking for specific differences with regard to sex and leadership.

Although no significant differences were found, it is the conclusion of this researcher that additional studies on alternative school principals are needed. Again, studying alternative school principals within their setting and with their inherent limitations is necessary in order to establish possible norms with regard to leadership styles associated with principals of non-traditional schools. Making comparisons between male and female principals with alternative and traditional schools would require the study and comparison of leadership styles of principals of both school types.

Understanding the alternative school teacher is crucial for understanding the climate of alternative schools. Additional research on the staff of these schools would be interesting and noteworthy. For example, a study identifying why teachers pursue careers in alternative education, how long they stay in these schools, and how they believe they most affect the climate of these schools could provide important information. While observing the principals within their settings for this study, this observer noticed that like their leaders, alternative school teachers appear to be passionate about the students and have a desire to see them do well. Although that would not necessarily make them different from most teachers in any setting, alternative school teachers often work in schools with limited funding, buildings that are in desperate need of repair, and with the most challenging population of students. Teachers, as a variable, are crucial to understanding the phenomena of leadership within the alternative education setting.

Finally, more research on the alternative education student population is needed to further understand both school climate and school leadership. Although this is a difficult population of students to study because, as a group, they may be difficult to work with,



unpredictable, and unresponsive to adults that they do not know or trust, they are the primary reasons that these schools exist. Again, this researcher believes that there is a need for more qualitative research in this area. This type of research would possibly involve extensive case studies in order for trust to be established. The schools involved in this study were primarily secondary schools (Grades 7-12). This group of students could potentially reach age 21. Understanding these students and their ideas about why they have been identified “at risk” would be research that could potentially assist researchers, teachers, and principals that work most closely with alternative school students. Once the researcher has a better understanding of what factors might help this group of students succeed, tools for measuring success, school climate, and effective leadership can be designed.

### **Conclusion**

This study began as a means by which to identify differences in leadership with regard to sex and how these differences influence the climate of alternative schools. Throughout this study, the researcher has gained a better understanding of the non-traditional aspect of alternative schools and how limiting these factors can be when studying the effect of leadership on alternative school climate. The purpose of this study was three-fold: to add to existing literature, to add to the current knowledge base of leadership sex differences within education, and to add to research on alternative school climate.

Limited research was found on alternative schools. Although literature exists, it is rarely research-based, but rather descriptions of programs and students. This research will add to the current literature base because it was an actual study that involved both the staff and leadership of six alternative schools. In addition, this research attempted to discern

differences in leadership styles between male and female principals' within alternative education. Although no significant differences were noted, this research does describe six working male and female alternative school principals. Through the interview process, this researcher was able to learn a great deal about which leadership traits, overall, lead to a positive alternative school climate. In this case, collaboration, shared governance, and involvement in the decision-making process emerged as common themes surrounding positive school climate, which occurred in all six of the schools studied.

While there is a considerable literature base related to alternative education, few studies have been conducted on alternative schools, specifically, the climate of alternative schools. This study attempted to add to the existing literature base of alternative education research. The concepts of alternative education are not new, however, the number of alternative education students continues to increase. There is an increased need for alternative schools and principals that have a research-based understanding of how to help at-risk learners succeed. This researcher hopes that others may use the themes that emerged throughout the findings of this study to further increase the literature base for alternative education.

Finally, this researcher hypothesized that this research would be significant for three reasons: central administration hiring practices, programming at the higher education level, and the idea that the three themes of leadership, school climate, and alternative education could be better understood now than prior to this research. Central administrators, or those charged with hiring alternative school principals, will benefit from reviewing this research. Rather than focusing on the principal's sex or the idea that a principal's sex may be

significant for programming, the interviewer might ask questions pertaining to school climate, specifically with regard to collaboration, shared governance, and student relations. Both the principals and teachers felt that these particular subsets of school climate were particularly important for successful alternative school climates. Those hiring for these positions should be inclined to hire creative, patient leaders that do not have a need for complete autonomy or control. Leaders with an open-door policy, who are open to ideas, respond to and lead change, and listen to their staff and students will ultimately make good alternative school principals, regardless of whether they are male or female.

Few colleges and universities offer coursework in alternative education. It is imperative that teacher preparation programs begin to include this throughout the course of study. Although most pre-service teachers will not teach in alternative schools, it is likely that most teachers will encounter at-risk students. The ultimate goal of any educator should be to prevent students from becoming “at-risk” and be identified for alternative education programming. Understanding this population of students and recognizing how they learn best will benefit the students and prevent more students from becoming candidates for alternative school programming. Likewise, educating future teachers and administrators could lead to better student teaching experiences in alternative schools, more understanding of alternative education students, and perhaps a growing number of talented teachers that may have an interest in working with this challenging group of students.

Finally, this researcher attempted to link three categories that are not often studied together—alternative education, leadership, and school climate. Little research was uncovered with regard to alternative education, specifically how alternative education relates

to school climate and leadership. More specifically, this research examined whether or not a principal's sex impacted the climate of alternative schools. Although sex differences were not a primary factor in the leaders' role within alternative education, specific leadership styles of alternative education principals were observed that can positively impact the climate of alternative schools.

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## APPENDIX A

### School-Level Environment Questionnaire – Revised

*The following are statements about the school in which you work and your working environment. Indicate how well each statement AGREES WITH YOUR DESCRIPTION OR POINT OF VIEWS of your school environment.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Teachers design instructional programs together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Most students are well mannered or respectful of the school staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Instructional equipment is <b>not</b> consistently accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Teachers are frequently asked to participate in decisions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. New and different ideas are always being tried out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. There is good communication among teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Most students are helpful and cooperative with teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The school library has sufficient resources and materials.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Decisions about the school are made by the principal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. New courses or curriculum materials are seldom implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I have regular opportunities to work with other teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Students in this school are well behaved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Video equipment, tapes, and films are readily available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I have very little say in the running of the school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. We are willing to try new teaching approaches in my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. I seldom discuss the needs of individual students with other teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Most students are motivated to learn.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. The supply of equipment and resources is <b>not</b> adequate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Teachers in this school are innovative.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Classroom instruction is rarely coordinated across teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. Good teamwork is <b>not</b> emphasized enough at my school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

From Johnson, B., Stevens, J. J. & Zvoch, K. (2007). Teachers' perceptions of school climate: A validity study of the revised School Level Environment Survey (SLEQ). *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 67, 833-844.

## **Revised SLEQ – Items & Factors**

### Collaboration

- 1. Teachers design instructional programs together.
- 6. There is good communication among teachers.
- 11. I have regular opportunities to work with other teachers.
- 16. I seldom discuss the needs of individual students with other teachers.
- 20. Classroom instruction is rarely coordinated across teachers.
- 21. Good teamwork is not emphasized enough at my school.

### Student Relations

- 2. Most students are well mannered or respectful of the school staff.
- 7. Most students are helpful and cooperative with teachers.
- 12. Students in this school are well behaved.
- 17. Most students are motivated to learn.

### School Resources

- 3. Instructional equipment is not consistently accessible.
- 8. The school library has sufficient resources and materials.
- 13. Video equipment, tapes, and films are readily available.
- 18. The supply of equipment and resources is not adequate.

### Decision Making

- 4. Teachers are frequently asked to participate in decisions.
- 9. Decisions about the school are made by the principal.
- 14. I have very little say in the running of the school.

### Instructional Innovation

- 5. New and different ideas are always being tried out.
- 10. New courses or curriculum materials are seldom implemented.
- 15. We are willing to try new teaching approaches in my school.
- 19. Teachers in this school are innovative.



## Appendix B

### RESEARCH TOPIC APPROVAL FORM

Banner ID# @

Name: Jessica Wenton

Address: 1402 Wenton Lane

City, State, Zip Stroudsburg, PA 18360

Phone Number: 570-629-2466  
jwenton@pmsd.org

E-Mail:

When this form has been returned to the Assistant Dean for Research in the Graduate School (120 Stright Hall), the Assistant Dean will notify the student that the research proposal has been approved. **The student should not begin the research activity until that notice has been received.**

**PLEASE NOTE: IF CHANGES OCCUR, EITHER IN COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP OR TOPIC, A NEW FORM MUST BE COMPLETED AND APPROVED.**

**SECTION I.** (To be completed by the student)

☐ Thesis

☒ Dissertation

Department: Education

Degree: D.Ed.

Title of Study: The Impact of a Principal's Sex on the Climate of Alternative Schools

ATTACH TO THIS FORM A BRIEF 1-2 PAGE SUMMARY OF YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC, including the method of study you expect to use, materials and equipment you will need, and an estimated time frame to complete each step of the process.

Check which one of the approved style manuals you will be using:

- ☐ American Chemical Society, *The ACS Style Guide*, Third Edition
- ☒ American Psychological Association, *Publication Manual*, Fifth Edition
- ☐ American Sociological Association, *ASA Style Guide*, Second Edition
- ☐ Council of Science Editors, Inc., *Scientific Style and Format*, Seventh Edition
- ☐ Modern Language Association, *MLA Handbook...Research Papers*, Sixth Edition

☐ Turabian, *A Manual for...Theses, Dissertations*

Signature of Student

---

Date: 9/3/09

Anticipated Graduation Date: May, 2010

**SECTION II. (To be completed by thesis/dissertation committee and pertinent university administrators)**

Having affixed my signature below, I hereby approve the research proposal and agree to serve on the above student's thesis/ dissertation committee (3 to 5 faculty on the committee).

---

(Date) (Typed or printed name and signature of Committee Chairperson)

---

(Date) (Typed or printed name and signature of Committee Member)

---

(Date) (Typed or printed name and signature of Committee Member)

---

(Date) (Typed or printed name and signature of Committee Member)

---

(Date) (Typed or printed name and signature of Committee Member)

**College Approvals: (To be completed by Graduate Coordinator) \_\_\_\_\_ Number of credits required by department for this thesis or dissertation. This number will be entered into the database and will determine when the chairperson can receive compensation for chairing the thesis or dissertation.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Department Chairperson may sign in the absence of Graduate Coordinator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date transmitted to College Dean's Office*

\_\_\_\_\_  
As Dean of the College, I will serve on the above committee.

\_\_\_\_\_  
As Dean of the College, I hereby appoint the following person to serve on the committee as my representative:  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I choose neither to serve on the committee nor to appoint a representative.

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean of the College Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Graduate School Approval:**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Dean for Research

IRB Review Required: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Date Protocol Received \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Approval \_\_\_\_\_

Animal Care Review Required: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Date Protocol Received \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Approval \_\_\_\_\_

Earliest date for Candidate's graduation:

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C  
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania  
**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**  
**Human Subject Research Application**

Title **The Effect of a Principal's Sex on the Climate of Alternative Schools**

Principle Investigator (PI): Jessica Wenton

Address: 1402 Wenton Lane Stroudsburg, PA 18360

Email: jwenton@pmsd.org

Possible Level of Review: (check one)

Telephone: 570-629-2466

☐ Exempt      ☒ Full      ☐ Expedited

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated Project Dates:      Begin: April 15, 2009      End: June, 2009

If this project is funded or if the  
investigator is seeking funding, list  
the agency(s) and/or source(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**(IRB Use only) IRB #** \_\_\_\_\_

To comply with the federally mandated educational requirement, have you, as the PI and all of the key personnel for the proposed research project, completed the on-line tutorial (<http://cme.nci.nih.gov>) on the protection of human subjects?

☒ **Yes**      ☐ **No**

As a result of the federal regulations, protocols submitted to the IRB without this requirement successfully completed will not be reviewed until the requirement has been met.

A printout of the computer generated certification of your successful tutorial completion must be either attached to this protocol application or be on record in the Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs.

---

IRB Assurance Statement

I have read and understand East Stroudsburg University's Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research as stated, and I agree:  
to accept responsibility for the scientific and ethical conduct of this research study;  
to obtain IRB approval prior to revising or altering the research protocol or the approved Informed Consent form;  
to immediately report to the IRB any serious adverse reactions and/or unanticipated effects on subjects which occur as a result of this study.

---

*PI Signature*

---

*Date*

---

*Print Name*

---

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor Assurance Statement

As the Faculty Advisor/Sponsor, I certify that I have reviewed this protocol and affirm that merit of this research project and the competency of the investigator(s) to conduct the project. (A signature is required for all student research projects, and for all persons not affiliated with East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania).

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

---

*Print Name*

List all persons, other than the PI, who will have a role in the research project (if necessary include an additional sheet of paper).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of subject population:

Number of subjects: 30

Age Range(s): 22+

Gender of subjects: ☐ Males Only

(Check One) ☐ Females Only

☒ Both Males and Females

Check all categories that apply to the subjects:

☐ Cognitively Impaired

☐ Minors (individuals under the age of 18 yrs.)

☐ Normal/Healthy Volunteers

☐ Patients/Clients

☐ Other, Explain: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Pregnant Women

☐ Prisoners

☐ Students

☐ Student Athletes

Will any information pertaining to the research be withheld from the subjects (e.g., as in a deception study)?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If Yes, for what purpose? \_\_\_\_\_

List the location(s) where the research will be conducted:

Alternative Schools in Northeastern Pennsylvania  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If an advertisement(s) will be used to recruit subjects, indicate the format(s) to be used:

☐ Flyer

☐ Radio

☐ Newspaper

☐ Television (e.g., public access channel)

☐ Electronic Media, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Other, describe: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*\*ATTACH COPIES OF ALL ADVERTISEMENTS TO THE PROTOCOL\*\*\***

If any part of the research is to be conducted at another institution with a collaborator, provide the following information for that person:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

If any part of the research is to be conducted at an institution, or in conjunction with another organization, other than East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, provide the name and contact information for a person who can give permission to conduct the research. (This generally will be the person who will write the letter of permission to conduct the research).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Protocol # **ESU-IRB-064a-0910**

To: **Molly Whalen and Jessica Wenton**

Proposal Title: **“The Effect of a Principal’s Sex on the Climate of Alternate Schools”**

**Review Approved:**    Exempted                      Expedited                      Full Review **X**

**X** Your full review research proposal has been approved by the University IRB (12 months). Please provide the University IRB a copy of your Final Report at the completion of your research. (Extension granted)

\_\_\_\_ Your full review research proposal has been approved with recommendations by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and **submit necessary documentation for full approval.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Your full review research proposal has not been approved by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and resubmit.

\_\_\_\_ Your exempted review research proposal has been approved by the University (2 months). Please provide the University IRB a copy of your Final Report at the completion of your research.

\_\_\_\_\_ Your exempted review research proposal has been approved with recommendations by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and **submit necessary documentation for full approval.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Your exempted review research proposal has not been approved by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and resubmit, if appropriate.

## EXPEDITED RESEARCH

\_\_\_\_\_ Your expedited review research proposal has been approved by the University IRB (12 months). Please provide the University IRB a copy of your Final Report at the completion of your research.

\_\_\_\_\_ Your expedited review research proposal has been approved with recommendations by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and **submit necessary documentation for full approval.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Your expedited review research proposal has not been approved by the University IRB. Please review recommendations provided by the reviewers and resubmit, if appropriate.

---

Please revise or submit the following:



Appendix E  
Jessica Wenton  
Pocono Mountain School District  
Clear Run Intermediate School  
3600 Memorial Blvd.  
Tobyhanna, PA 18466  
[jwenton@pmsd.org](mailto:jwenton@pmsd.org)

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student in Leadership and Administration at Indiana University of Pennsylvania under the supervision of Dr. Kathleen Foster, East Stroudsburg University Chairperson. I am writing to ask your participation in my research study which will investigate the impact of a principal's gender on the climate of alternative schools. The results of this research will give leaders and districts important information about school climate. It will also add to the current knowledge base of gender differences in educational leadership. A review of the literature located revealed no relevant research on the impact of the principal's gender on the climate of alternative schools. With the number of alternative schools on the increase, more studies are needed on these schools, the students, and most importantly, their leaders.

There are two components of the study. First, I would like to interview you for approximately 60 minutes. The open-ended questions that I will ask you are included for your review. Secondly, I am requesting that your staff complete the Revised-Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ). This is a 21 item survey that teachers take measuring their perceptions of school climate. The Revised SLEQ takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. In addition, I am requesting that you provide me with your 2008-2009 end of the year school data on attendance rates and PSSA scores. Due to the format of this data, no individual students will be identified. Please note that I am not seeking information about individual students. All survey, interview, and school data will be completely confidential. All surveys will be completed on-line with a user name and password. I am also willing to speak with your staff about this study and their participation and answer any questions that they might have. I will make arrangements with you as the school leader once your consent is given. Please complete the consent form attached indicating your commitment to participate in this study and return it to me via e-mail at [jwenton@pmsd.org](mailto:jwenton@pmsd.org) or via fax at 570-894-9329. I appreciate your time, since I do know how valuable it is.

Again, I want to reiterate that data will be kept completely confidential. This study will not identify individual schools or leaders. Please retain this letter for information regarding informed consent. Participation by you and your teachers is voluntary, and you and your teachers are free to withdraw at anytime. Although there are no known risks, minimal risks

and/or discomforts may be associated with this study. Every precaution will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your response. However, there is always minimal risk that the confidentiality of the data could be compromised due to unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of the investigator. My handling of your data will be consistent with the standards in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (Federal Register, 1991) and the Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants (APA, 1982). Data will be analyzed within the context of available aggregated data obtained for your school profile on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website. The end product will protect your confidentiality. Only the principal investigator will have access to the codes that match the survey to data.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 570-839-7121, extension 61412 or 570-629-2466, or via e-mail at [jwenton@pmsd.org](mailto:jwenton@pmsd.org). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Kathleen Foster at East Stroudsburg University via e-mail at [kfoster@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:kfoster@po-box.esu.edu) if you have any questions about the purpose, content, or methodology involved in this study. You may contact Dr. Shala Davis at [sdavis@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:sdavis@po-box.esu.edu) if you have any human subject concerns. Specific information regarding the outcomes of the study will be shared upon completion of the study by appointment. I will make every effort to ensure that your time is spent wisely. I appreciate your help with this very important project.

Sincerely,

Jessica Wenton

## Appendix F

### INFORMED CONSENT – BUILDING PRINCIPAL

#### *“The Impact of a Principal’s Sex on the Climate of Alternative Schools”*

##### **Research Description:**

This study is designed to investigate the impact of a leader’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. Specifically, the problem is “Does a principal’s sex have an impact on the climate of alternative schools?” A mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative components will determine the answers to these questions. Quantitative data will be obtained through a survey, the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire- Revised that participants will take on-line. Data will be collected and analyzed in order to determine significance. A qualitative piece will be included in this study and data will be gathered through an interview. Each alternative school principal will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes on his or her views on school climate. Participants in this study will be non-random, as they will be selected based on their leadership status within an alternative school in Monroe, Pike, or Northampton County in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The purpose of this study is to add to existing literature on sex differences in educational leadership. A thorough review of the literature revealed no relevant research on the impact of the principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. With the number of alternative schools on the increase, more studies are needed on these schools, the students, and their leaders.

##### **Procedure:**

This study will take place in the fall of 2009. The preliminary work for the study, including letters of intent, IRB application, and final approval of the proposal will occur early in the fall of 2009. There are two components of the study. First, I will interview the alternative school principal for approximately 60 minutes. Secondly; I am requesting that the staff in each alternative school complete the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ). This is a 21 item survey that teachers take measuring their perceptions of school climate. The Revised SLEQ takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. In addition, I am requesting that each school leader provide me with 2008-2009 end of the year data on attendance rates and PSSA scores. Due to the format of this data, no individual students will be identified. Please note that I am not seeking information about individual students. All survey, interview, and school data will be completely confidential. All surveys will be completed on-line with a user name and password that will be included in the e-mail that will be provided to the alternative school principal. The researcher will interview each alternative school administrator participating in this study. The data will be recorded and analyzed during the later part of the fall semester and the results will be published and shared with the participants and with the final review board for this dissertation.

**Risks and Benefits:**

There are no anticipated risks to you or your staff from participating in this study. All data will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this research study. Although student data will be used in this study, no individual or identifying characteristics about specific students or subgroups of students will be included. My handling of your data will be consistent with the standards in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (Federal Register, 1991) and the Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants (APA, 1982). Data will be analyzed within the context of available aggregated data obtained for your school profile on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website. The end product will protect your confidentiality. No names will be associated with the survey data, as a numeric code with a password will be utilized. Only the principal investigator will have access to the codes that match the survey to data. You may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me directly, asking for recorded interviews to be stopped, or by advising your staff not to complete the on-line survey. Your participation, although greatly appreciated, is strictly voluntary.

The results of this study will benefit administrators and staff that work with alternative education students. Currently, there is no relevant data on the impact of a principal's gender on the climate of alternative schools. This specific group of administrators needs to be studied more in order to gain additional insights into how some of our most fragile populations of students can be more successful.

**For More Information:**

The Principal Investigator of the Research Study, Jessica Wenton, can be contacted via phone at either 570-839-7121, ext. 61411 or 570-807-6091. In addition, the researcher can also be contacted via e-mail at [jwenton@pmsd.org](mailto:jwenton@pmsd.org). If you have any concerns about this study, including the procedure, you may also contact Dr. Kathleen Foster at East Stroudsburg University via e-mail at [kfoster@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:kfoster@po-box.esu.edu) or Institutional Review Board Chair, Dr. Shala Davis via phone at 570-422-3336.

I have read and understand the information in this letter and understand that I may direct all questions to the Principal Researcher, Jessica Wenton. In addition, I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

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Signature

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Date

## **SUPERINTENDENT/DISTRICT LETTER OF APPROVAL**

Jessica Wenton  
Pocono Mountain School District  
Clear Run Intermediate School  
3600 Memorial Blvd.  
Tobyhanna, PA 18466  
[jwenton@pmsd.org](mailto:jwenton@pmsd.org)

Dear Superintendent:

Per our conversation, I currently serve as the Principal of Clear Run Intermediate School in the Pocono Mountain School District. I have been working to obtain my doctoral degree at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am currently seeking permission to gather data in reference to my study and would greatly appreciate it if you could set aside a few minutes of your valuable time to review this document. My dissertation will study the impact of a principal's gender on the climate of alternative schools. I am hoping that you will support my research by approving the request to have members of your school district participate in this study. If so, please sign the approval form and return it to my attention in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Sincerely,

Jessica Wenton  
Principal  
Clear Run Intermediate School  
Pocono Mountain School District  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Student  
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

This project will be submitted for approval by the East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania  
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Dr. Shala B. Davis, IRB Administrator, (570) 422-3536 x3336

INFORMED CONSENT – DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT  
*“The Impact of a Principal’s Sex on the Climate of Alternative Schools”*

**Research Description:**

This study is designed to investigate the impact of a leader’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. Specifically, the problem is “Does a principal’s sex have an impact on the climate of alternative schools?” A mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative components will determine the answers to these questions. Quantitative data will be obtained through a survey, the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire- Revised that participants will take on-line. Data will be collected and analyzed in order to determine significance. A qualitative piece will be included in this study and will occur through an interview. Each alternative school principal will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes on his or her views on school climate. Participants in this study will be non-random, as they will be selected based on their leadership status within an alternative school in Monroe, Pike, or Northampton County in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The purpose of this study is to add to existing literature on sex differences in educational leadership. A thorough review of the literature revealed no relevant research on the impact of the principal’s sex on the climate of alternative schools. With the number of alternative schools on the increase, more studies are needed on these schools, the students, and their leaders.

**Procedure:**

This study will take place in the fall of 2009. The preliminary work for the study, including letters of intent, IRB application, and final approval of the proposal will occur early in the spring of 2009. There are two components of the study. First, I will interview the alternative school principal for approximately 60 minutes. Secondly; I am requesting that the staff in each alternative school complete the Revised-School Level Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ). This is a 21 item survey that teachers take measuring their perceptions of school climate. The Revised SLEQ takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. In addition, I am requesting that each school leader provide me with 2008-2009 end of the year data on attendance rates and PSSA scores. Due to the format of this data, no individual students will be identified. Please note that I am not seeking information about individual students. All survey, interview, and school data will be completely confidential. All surveys will be completed on-line with a user name and password that will be included in the e-mail that will be provided to the alternative school principal. The researcher will interview each alternative school administrator participating in this study. The data will be recorded and analyzed during the later part of the fall semester and the results will be published and shared with the participants and with the final review board for this dissertation.

Specifically, I am asking for district approval to complete the following:

- Conduct an interview with the principal of your alternative school
- Distribute an electronic survey to the teaching staff at the alternative school
- Conduct a data analysis of 2008 – 2009 PSSA data

#### **Risks and Benefits:**

There are no anticipated risks to you or your staff from participating in this study. All data will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purpose of this research study. Although student data will be used in this study, no individual or identifying characteristics about specific students or subgroups of students will be included. My handling of your data will be consistent with the standards in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (Federal Register, 1991) and the Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants (APA, 1982). Data will be analyzed within the context of available aggregated data obtained for your school profile on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website. The end product will protect your confidentiality. Only the principal investigator will have access to the codes that match the survey to data. Your staff may withdraw from this study at any time by contacting me directly, asking for recorded interviews to be stopped, or by advising your staff not to complete the on-line survey. Your participation, although greatly appreciated, is strictly voluntary.

The results of this study will benefit administrators and staff that work with alternative education students. Currently, there is no relevant data on the impact of a principal's gender on the climate of alternative schools. This particular group of administrators needs to be studied more in order to gain additional insights into how some of our most fragile populations of students can be more successful.

#### **For More Information:**

The Principal Investigator of the Research Study, Jessica Wenton, can be contacted via phone at either 570-839-7121, ext. 61411 or 570-807-6091. In addition, the researcher can also be contacted via e-mail at [jwenton@pmsd.org](mailto:jwenton@pmsd.org). If you have any concerns about this study, including the procedure, you may also contact Dr. Kathleen Foster at East Stroudsburg University via e-mail at [kfoster@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:kfoster@po-box.esu.edu) or Institutional Review Board Chair, Dr. Shala Davis via phone at 570-422-3336 or via e-mail at [sdavis@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:sdavis@po-box.esu.edu). I have read and understand the information in this letter and understand that I may direct all questions to the Principal Researcher, Jessica Wenton. In addition, I understand that my staff may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

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Signature

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Date

## Appendix G

The following protocol will be considered for the alternative school principal interview.

Date:

Time:

Place

Interviewer:

The following statement will be read to each interviewee:

*This interview is being conducted for the purpose of research. Information obtained during this interview will be analyzed, and with your permission, included in the findings of this study. This interview will be recorded once your verbal consent is given. Once I begin taping, I will again ask you if you consent to the recording of this interview. Do you have any questions before we begin? Do you consent to the recording of this interview?*

Begin recording. *“Do you consent to the recording of this interview? Please state your name and position. I will ask you a series of 5 questions, which have previously been made available to you. Please feel free to add additional comments if you feel they will enhance the answers to the pre-determined questions.”*

### Interview Questions

1. How do you schedule time for content area teachers to collaborate and plan activities and lessons?
2. Do you see common planning time as beneficial? In what ways?
3. What strategies does your staff use to motivate “at-risk” students?
4. What resources are necessary to maintain a positive alternative school climate?
5. How do you seek input from teachers before making change or implementing new initiatives?
6. How do teachers bring new ideas to you? Describe the format or process by which they do this.
7. How do you utilize teacher input?
8. Describe your leadership style and indicate whether or not you feel there is a need for shared governance within your school’s structure.

*“Thank you for your participation. I appreciate your assistance with this very important study. Do you have any questions or would you like to add anything before taping ends?”*