

**Teacher Perceptions Of Leadership Behavior And
Change Within
Their Schools**

Otis K. LoVette

Northeast Louisiana University

Ralph Karst

Northeast Louisiana University

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Abstract

The pulse of our schools is often being taken to determine some degree of health or sickness and to see if reform efforts are working. In contrast to similar studies, the researchers, beginning a longitudinal study, surveyed teachers to determine their perceptions of respective school environments. Using a "Report Card on Satisfaction," teachers enrolled in graduate courses in educational leadership, assigned grades of A-F to 32 categories and entities. Researchers conducted statistical analyses of all data collected, but were concerned more specifically with perceptions relative to school leaders and change. The information gathered will provide baseline data to examine changes in teacher perception as various reform efforts within K-12 and higher education are implemented, begin to mature, and hopefully to show positive results.

John Naisbitt said in *Megatrends* (1982) that we are living in a very confused period, in the "time of the parenthesis." A time when we are experiencing great societal changes and every institution, especially education, is undergoing some type or degree of reform. Schools have found it necessary, or have been forced, to look for better, more efficient, and effective ways to do things. Schools, and education in general, have often been put in the spot light before the public, often in very negative ways, and a public outcry has arisen to "improve what is going on in education."

Soltis (1990) said that reforms are being proposed to repair, improve, and redirect institutions and these reform processes pose difficult challenges, especially for administrators. Deal (1990) indicated that teachers may become resistant to change (reform efforts) because they know that in substance most proposals are not new but resemble previous efforts that have failed. They have often become cynical because they feel that they are being forced to join a "carousel of reform." As Cuban (1990) said, reforms do "return again, again, and again."

It seems as though the pulse of our schools is often being taken to determine some degree of health or sickness and to determine whether or not our reform efforts are succeeding. The *Kappan* has been "taking the pulse" of schools by conducting a survey of public attitudes regarding our schools; last year was the 27th year for the annual poll (Elam & Rose, 1995). When measuring the degree of health or sickness and the effectiveness of reform, researchers and others often go to sources outside the schools, like the public, to ask them how they perceive "what is going on" inside. As a contrast, the researchers decided to measure perceptions relative to various aspects of the school environment by surveying those persons on the "inside." How do teachers, more specifically those in programs designed to prepare school administrators and supervisors, perceive various facets of their school environment?

The study was initially conducted to develop base-line data regarding teacher perceptions of various factors that impact the school environment, and consequently teaching and learning. It was anticipated that the data gathered would provide impetus for further study by students or the faculty and would also be useful in

targeting university instruction and providing assistance for school leaders. Of special interest to the researchers were perceptions relating to leader behavior of building administrators and various factors relating to "change" in a 15-parish area in northeast Louisiana. (Louisiana has 64 parish and two city school districts.) The study will continue on a longitudinal (yearly) basis to investigate changes in teacher perceptions as various reforms are implemented and new principals, prepared using new certification standards, fill the ranks of those retiring.

Two major areas of focus in the research conducted related to teacher perception relative to receptiveness to change and leader behavior of school administrators. Research done by Gordon and Whitford (1991) indicated that a "supportive" administrative style accounted for a positive attitude on the part of teachers as did a "change-oriented," collegial faculty. How do teachers perceive their peers? Do they perceive them as "change-oriented" or receptive to change? Organizational behaviorists recognize that resistance to innovation is deeply rooted in psychological and group culture and humans are profoundly ambivalent about change (Schein 1985). We (including teachers) collectively exalt change in principle, but may oppose it in practice.

Abundant research exists related to the importance of desirable leader behavior at the school level. It appears that teachers' negative perceptions of their building principals' leadership behavior may manifest themselves in negative ways, especially impacting job satisfaction. Chittom and Sistrunk (1990) studied teachers' perceptions of school climate and their levels of job satisfaction. They found a significant positive correlation between teacher satisfaction with the school climate and teacher perception of the principal's leadership behavior. In their studies of teacher attrition, Chapman and Hutcheson (1982) found that the actions of the principal had a significant effect on teachers' job satisfaction. Taylor and Tashakkori (1994) examined the relationship of teacher decisional participation and school climate to teachers' sense of efficacy and their job satisfaction. They found that principal leadership had a "relatively" strong association with teachers' feelings of job satisfaction. Natale (1993) reported that teachers may choose to leave the profession because they are troubled by lack of professionalism, collegiality, recognition or control, and often by "inadequate administrative support."

Methods

Participants

Those persons completing the survey were graduate students in the Administration and Supervision Program at Northeast Louisiana University. Each of those surveyed was teaching in a public or private school at the time and was taking at least one evening course. The survey was administered during the spring semester and the first summer term of 1995 to all students enrolled. Tables 1, 2, and 3 contain the demographic data relative to the participants.

Table 1							
Age, Education, and Experience of Participants; Number and Percent							
Age		Education			Experience		
21-25	10(11.4)		BS	21(23.9)		0	2(2.3)
26-30	15(17.0)		BS +15	18(20.5)		1-5	29(33.0)
31-35	10(11.4)		BS +30	9(10.2)		6-10	17(19.3)

36-40	20(22.7)		MS	10(11.4)		11-15	10(11.4)
41-45	15(11.4)		MS +15	5(5.7)		16-20	11(12.5)
46-50	12(13.6)		MS +30	20(26.7)		21-25	12(13.6)
51-55	5(5.7)		Ed.S.	2(2.3)		26-30	5(5.7)
56-60	0(0.0)		Ed.D.	0(0.0)		31-35	1(1.1)

Table 2				
Marital Status and Level of Participants; Number and Percent				
Marital Status			Level	
Married	17(76.1)		Elementary	37(42.0)
Single	13(19.3)		Middle/J.H.	23(26.1)
Single parent	3(3.4)		High	23(26.1)
Separated	1(1.1)		Other	4(4.5)

Table 3				
Tenure Status and Type of School of Participants; Number and Percent				
Tenure			Type	
Yes	60(68.2)		Private	9(10.2)
No	27(30.7)		Public	78(88.6)
Other	1(1.1)		Other	1(1.1)

Materials

An instrument was prepared (see Appendix) which was named a "Report card on Satisfaction." The instrument was initially developed by one of the researchers while serving at Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU). The first respondents were graduate students who were then teaching in public or private schools, and were enrolled in administration or supervision classes during the fall semester of 1993 at SLU. The survey was completed as part of their study of school climate. The data were tallied and those students who completed the instrument were involved in its redevelopment and improvement. The redeveloped instrument was again administered to a similar group of students at SLU in the spring of 1994.

The instrument was designed to have clear instructions, use a simple format for reporting (A, B, C, D, F, NA), be limited to one page, and have space for comments by responders. Respondents were to remain anonymous.

Design and Procedure

The following research questions relative to "leadership behavior" and "teacher receptiveness to change" were posed for this particular analysis.

1. In what areas do teachers give their building administrators the highest grades?
2. In what areas do teachers give their building administrators the poorest grades?
3. How do administrator grades for ". . . empowers others and shares leadership" relate to the "Overall grade" for administrators?
4. How do administrator grades for "Supports innovation" relate to the "Overall grade" for administrators?
5. Do "tenured" teachers grade their administrators higher than "non-tenured" teachers?
6. Which group ("level"), elementary, middle school/junior high, or high school grades their administrators the highest?
7. Which group, "MS and above" or "BS, BS +15, BS +30" grades their administrators the highest?
8. Which "age" group grades their administrators the highest?
9. Which "experience" group grades their administrators the highest?
10. How do teachers grade their peers' "Receptiveness to change" relative to their overall grade ("Overall performance as a group of professional")? Other questions which were posed for the research were as follows.
11. Which 10 items on the survey received the highest grades (rank ordered)?
12. Which 10 items on the survey received the lowest grades (rank ordered)?

Analysis of Data

Testing of the data was done by computation of mean grades and, where appropriate, by using a two-tailed test for probability with significance established at the .05 level. Respondents' comments were also recorded and are listed in Table 4.

1. *In what areas do teachers give their building administrators the highest grades?*

The mean "Overall grade" for building administrators was 2.68. Participants gave the highest grades, expressed as means, on the following three items:

2.93 As supporter/promoter of innovation and improvement

2.78 As a facilitator of my work

2.75 As one who creates a positive school climate

Table 4
Comments
"I believe as a whole the support of education in Louisiana is at an all time low."
"I received some training in California that helped to prepare me as a teacher."
"NLU has helped me greatly in improving my education. I would rate it (NLU) an A+."
"If the money was better and the parents were more supportive, I would teach 20 more years."
"Don't misunderstand my feelings about my principal. He is a super person, but he is about to retire and is letting things go to the dogs."
"This is the principal's first year as a secondary principal."
"I am very satisfied with the teaching profession, the students I work with, and with most of my peers. I look forward to learning and moving forward."
"Northeast has done an excellent job preparing me on the graduate level, but did a pitiful job on the undergraduate level."
"#20 - Not many area businesses and they are small and struggling. #31 - Just starting. #30 - Very good undergraduate program."
"Overall, I'm satisfied; if there were only some way to make parents more responsible for their children."

2. In what areas do teachers give their building administrators the poorest *grades*?

Participants gave the lowest grades, expressed as means, on the following three items:

2.45 As disciplinarian

2.59 As instructional leader

2.61 As one who empowers others and shares leadership

3. *How do grades for ". . . empowers others and shares leadership" relate to the "Overall grade" for administrators?*

The norm grade given for this item did not differ significantly from the overall grade norm.

4. *How do administrator grades for "Supports innovation" relate to the "Overall grade" for administrators?*

The norm grade given for this item was significantly different (.002) from the overall norm.

5. *Do "tenured" teachers grade their administrators higher than "non-tenured" teachers?*

There was no statistical difference in the grades given by these two groups.

6. *Which group ("level"), elementary, middle school/junior high, or high school grades their administrators the highest?*

The elementary teachers gave their administrators the highest grades (3.0). Testing between groups revealed a significant difference (.016) in the mean grades awarded by the 10 elementary teachers and that given by the high school teachers (2.35). Junior high/middle school administrators' grade norm was 2.61.

7. *Which group, "MS and above" or "BS, BS +15, BS +30" grades their administrators the highest?*

No significance was found when examining the norm grades given by the two groups.

8. *Which "age" group grades their administrators the highest?*

No significance was found when examining the differences in norms of the various "age" groups.

9. *Which "experience" group grades their administrators the highest?*

No significance was found when examining the differences in norms of the various "experience" groups.

10. *How do teachers grade their peers' "Receptiveness to change" relative to their overall grade ("Overall performance as a group of professionals")?*

A significant difference ($< .001$) was found in the grades given for these two items. The "Overall performance. . . ." received a grade of 3.2 and the "Receptiveness to change" received a 2.68.

11. *Which 10 items on the survey received the highest grades (rank ordered)?*

The 10 items which received the highest grades were:

- (1) 3.44 The people I work with
- (2) 3.38 My peers - Helpfulness and supportiveness of my efforts
- (3) 3.29 My peers - Helpfulness and supportiveness of students
- (4) 3.29 My training - To become an administrator
- (5) 3.28 My peers - Cooperativeness
- (6) 3.20 My peers - Overall performance as a group of professionals

- (7) 3.14 My training - To become a teacher
- (8) 3.08 My peers - Attitude about education and the importance of their jobs
- (9) 2.93 My building administrator - As supporter/promoter of innovation and improvement
- (10) 2.80 My Central Office - My superintendent

12. *Which 10 items on the survey received the lowest grades (rank ordered)?*

- (32) 1.62 My salary and benefits - Salary
- (31) 1.77 My salary and benefits - Benefits
- (30) 2.23 Financial support for programs - Instructional
- (29) 2.27 Community support for my school - Others who live in the district but are not parents
- (28) 2.36 Students - Behavior
- (27) 2.36 Students - Attitude
- (26) 2.39 Students - Motivation to learn
- (25) 2.41 Community support for my school - Parents
- (24) 2.41 Students - Respect for teacher/authority
- (23) 2.43 Financial support for programs - Other (athletics, clubs, etc.)

Discussion

A major goal the researchers had when conducting this study was to develop base-line data, utilizing graduate students who were teaching in K-12 institutions, relative to various facets of the school environment. The information which was and can be obtained through the "Report Card on Satisfaction" will be useful in studying changes in teacher perception of identified areas. The emphasis in this analysis related to perceptions related to building administrators and peer educators. The instrument has provided a wealth of other data for further analysis.

Statistical analysis of each of the research questions posed revealed several perceptions which were unexpected by the researchers. Discussion of each of the research questions follows. Comments are based upon the researchers' experience, observations in the field and familiarity with similar research.

1. It was not anticipated that teachers would give their highest grade to their administrators as "supporter/promoter of innovation and improvement." Some would tend to label building administrators as being resistant to change and improvement and working to preserve the status quo.

2. The lowest grade was given to administrators as disciplinarians. This was an anticipated result. Discipline is one of the major concerns in schools across our nation. Further indication of teacher concern about "students" and their discipline was seen in teacher grades relative to students (see responses to question 12).
3. Even though statistical analysis of data regarding "empowerment and sharing leadership" did not show any significant variance it was noted that the average grade for this area was 2.61, very similar to the overall grade of 2.68. This is one of the areas the researchers hope to see improve as university programs emphasize such practices in their school leadership programs.
4. As indicated above, finding that the administrator's grade for "Supports innovation" was significantly different (positive) than the grade for overall performance was a surprise. Perhaps this perception resulted from the principal's role as the person at the building level who must "pass on" requirements for change which are imposed by the central office, courts, legislature, and state education agencies. Perhaps building principals realize the need for change and reform and are better informed about such efforts because of their involvement in informative meetings, both required and elective.
5. Researchers will continue to examine perception relative to tenure status even though the present data revealed no data of statistical significance.
6. It was noteworthy, and anticipated, that elementary teachers gave their building administrators higher grades than would secondary teachers. Data revealed a significant difference in these two groups, with middle school/junior high administrators' grades falling between the two with no significant variations. One can only speculate as to the higher grades for elementary administrators. The researchers feel this is a fertile area for additional study.
7. Researchers will continue to examine perception relative to educational preparation though the present data revealed no data of statistical significance.
8. Data revealed no data of statistical significance when examining perceptions relative to various age groupings.
9. Data relative to years of experience showed no significance relative to grades for the overall performance of building administrators.
10. Teacher grades for their peers, relative to their "Receptiveness to change," revealed the biggest surprise. The significant difference ($< .001$) between their overall grade and this category was not anticipated and was somewhat puzzling. As discussed earlier, some would tend to think that teachers are more receptive to change than their administrators (especially when reported by teachers). This will be an area of special interest to the researchers as future studies using the "Report Card on Satisfaction" are conducted.
11. Teachers were very complimentary of their peers as indicated by the ranking of the average grades by each item in the investigation. Six of the items relating to teaching peers were in the top 10 items. This data indicated teachers feel very positively about their peer teachers, even though they rated them low on their "Receptiveness to change." Researchers were pleased to see that teachers indicated positive perceptions about their training to become administrators, with the item receiving the fourth highest grade.

12. The listing of those items receiving the lowest grades was no surprise. Teachers indicated strong negative feelings about items related to salary, benefits, and financial support for schools in general (4 items). It was also noteworthy that teachers gave low grades to community support (2 items) and students (4 items).

The information recorded will provide baseline data to examine possible changes in teacher perception as various reform efforts within K-12 and higher education are implemented, begin to mature, and hopefully to show positive results. It should be noted that perceptions "are real," at least to the perceiver, and consequently form the basis for teachers' responses to their school environment. It is important that such perceptions are monitored in an effort to be aware of and responsive to teacher needs, attitudes, and feelings. Without such information much of our improvement and reform activity will be without impact. This study's finding that there is a somewhat negative perception of teachers' reception to change gives cause for concern and should be investigated further. The finding that teachers perceive administrators as receptive to and promoting change is encouraging. It indicates that change efforts being made by school administrators in the area surveyed are perceived positively, at least by those who are pursuing graduate work in school administration.

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Appendix

Report Card on Satisfaction

Thank you for your time and candid responses. Respondents and schools will remain anonymous in this investigation. Data collected will form the basis of a study relating to "educator satisfaction" in northeast

Louisiana parishes. It is planned that the investigation will be conducted over a period of several years and will help identify changes in educator "satisfaction" with various elements of the school environment.

AGE	EDUCATION	EXPERIENCE:	MARITAL:	TENURE:
21-25	BS	0	married	yes
26-30	BS +15	1-5	single	no
31-35	BS +30	6-10	single parent	
36-40	MS	11-15	separated	TYPE:
41-45	MS +15	16-20		private
46-50	MS +30	21-25	LEVEL:	public
51-55	Ed.S.	26-30	elementary	
56-60	Ed.D. or	31-35	middle/jr.hi.	
60+	Ph.D.	36-40	high	
		40+	other (specify) _____	

PARISH/SYSTEM _____

You are asked to give a grade of (A, B, C, D, F) to each of the items below. **(Please do not use + or - with the grade.)** An "A" would indicate that you are "VERY SATISFIED," an "F" would indicate that you are "VERY DISSATISFIED. Please use "NA" where the question is not applicable to your situation.

GRADE

My working conditions

- _____ 1. The people I work with
- _____ 2. Resources available (equipment, supplies, etc.)
- _____ 3. School facilities

My building administrator (principal)

- _____ 4. As disciplinarian
- _____ 5. As instructional leader
- _____ 6. As supporter/promoter of innovation and improvement
- _____ 7. As a facilitator of my work
- _____ 8. As one who empowers others and shares leadership
- _____ 9. As one who creates a positive school climate
- _____ 10. Overall grade

My Central Office

___ 11. My superintendent/Chief school District Administrator

___ 12. My School Board/Board of Education

My peers (educators at your lover)

___ 13. Overall performance as a group of professionals

___ 14. Helpfulness and supportiveness of my efforts

___ 15. Helpfulness and supportiveness of students

___ 16. Cooperativeness

___ 17. Receptiveness to change

___ 18. Attitude about education and the importance of their jobs

Community support for my school

___ 19. Parents

___ 20. Business and industry

___ 21. Others who live in the district but are not parents

Students

___ 22. Motivation to learn

___ 23. Respect for teachers/authority

___ 24. Behavior

___ 25. Attentiveness in class

___ 26. Attitude

My salary and benefits

___ 27. Salary

___ 28. Benefits

Financial support for programs

___ 29. Instructional

___ 30. Other (athletics, clubs, etc.)

My training

___ 31. To become a teacher

___ 32. To become an administrator (), or _____ ()

COMMENTS: