

BROWN, KAREN LYNN ZIMMER, Ph.D., August 2005

EDUCATIONAL  
ADMINISTRATION

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL CULTURE  
AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ON OHIO SIXTH-GRADE PROFICIENCY TESTS  
(251 PP.)

Co-Directors of Dissertation: Fred Feitler, Ph.D.  
Ralph Waltman, Ph.D.

The relationship between school culture (measured by the Organizational Culture Questionnaire, OCQ) and improving proficiency test passage rates in reading and math on Ohio Sixth-Grade Proficiency Tests was examined for the period 1999-2002. Buildings were classified as urban improving, urban constant, suburban improving, suburban constant, rural improving, and rural constant. Improving status in urban and rural settings required 4% reading and math increases each year of the study. Improving status in suburban settings required reading and math increases of 6% over the three years. Suburban criterion was varied to insure participation of at least four buildings per classification category. Buildings in this mixed-methods study included five urban improving, seven urban constant, five suburban improving, eight suburban constant, six rural improving, and four rural constant for a total of 35 buildings and 749 participants. The sample was a stratified convenience sample.

The OCQ assessed nine school culture factors: (a) teamwork and cooperation, (b) decision-making, (c) trust and confidence, (d) responsibility and commitment, (e) communication, (f) general organizational practices, (g) vision and goals, (h) risk-taking, and (i) change and innovation. A total culture score was also reported.

Twenty principals and 19 sixth-grade teachers were drawn from participating buildings for phone interviews to further investigate school culture and strategies employed to increase student passage rates. Ethnographic study participants were four urban improving, eight urban constant, six suburban improving, nine suburban constant, eight rural improving, and four rural constant.

Suburban constant buildings reported significantly higher total culture scores than suburban improving buildings. Suburban buildings reported significantly higher total culture scores than urban or rural buildings. Differences between urban and rural buildings were not significant. Demographic differences of years employed in the building, years employed in the field of education, role, and gender were not significantly different.

Interviews with principals and teachers confirmed differences by setting. Urban districts mentioned labor contract restrictions on the building principal. Urban principals felt they were powerless; urban teachers felt their voices were not heard. Suburban buildings mentioned teacher leadership more frequently. Funding concerns and teacher growth were important in all categories.