

LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL CULTURAL CHANGE

**LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL CULTURE CHANGE THAT IMPACTS STUDENT  
ACHIEVEMENT**

by

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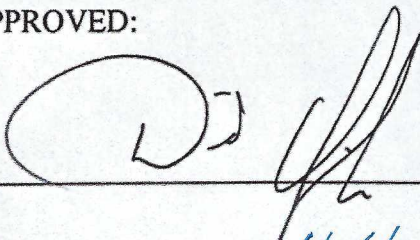
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**Leadership for School Culture Change that Impacts Student Achievement**

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### **Abstract**

Student learning and achievement are the goals of educational institutions. Within the educational context, teachers have a significant impact on student learning. The culture of a particular school will socialize teachers into behaving according to the norms of that culture. If the culture features ineffective instructional strategies, the students will have poorer outcomes. School culture impacts all involved stakeholders. Educational leaders need to understand the power of culture, and how to shape that culture in a positive manner.

Culture resists change; top-down approaches generally will not work to change culture (Fullan, 2015). What is necessary to bring about change is an understanding of change management theory as it relates to the educational setting. Educational leaders need to be adept at bringing change to their organization, meaning they have to understand the forces of change at work in schools. Leaders will need to be resolute as they build trust and relationships as part of a culture around collaboration and distributed leadership.

There is a need for cultural change in schools. Teachers often work in isolation, which allows ineffective practices to continue. When the culture changes, the impacts are on the students and their achievement. Changing a culture is not an easy task, nor is there any magic bullet. However, it is vital work. The principal has the chance to have as much impact on the students as the individual teacher. If the leader can create a positive culture, that culture will socialize teachers in effective teaching methods, which in turn will have an impact on the entire school.

*Keywords:* school culture, Change Management Theory, distributed leadership, educational leader, professional development, professional learning communities

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## **Leadership for School Culture Change that Impacts Student Achievement**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

#### **Introduction**

The main goal of every school should be student achievement. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) claimed, “Educators in a healthy school culture believe that all students can excel, and they willingly challenge and change their own practices to meet that end” (p. 14). There have been years of educational reform and research into improving outcomes for students. Waldron and McLeskey (2010) reported that “over the last 40 years, policymakers have called for school reform that improves the practices of teacher and other profession and increases student achievement.” (p. 58). Hargreaves and O’ Connor (2018) remarked that in the last 30 years, there have been many options for school improvement. These have included approaches such as professional learning communities, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, data teams, and more. The educational world is interested in improvement that leads to increased student achievement.

It is critical to understand what has the most impact on student achievement. It has been well-documented that one of the most influential factors for student achievement is the classroom teacher (Johnson, 2012). Given that students depend highly on their teachers for their academic success, it follows that improving teacher skills will benefit students. Teachers should be committed to developing their pedagogical backgrounds in order to best suit their students’ needs; however, this is not always the reality in the school context. Schmoker (2006) reported in an observational study that encompassed 1500 classrooms that less than one percent of those

classrooms used high-yield strategies. There is thus a need to improve teacher efficacy in order to impact student achievement.

The standards of excellent teaching imply that there are many less-than-effective teachers (Zayac et al., 2021). Teachers seem to face a steep learning curve in their first few years of teaching. For the first few years, their growth is exponential (Bennet & Rolheiser, 2001). However, teachers often plateau in their development, and over time, this plateauing leads to development of ineffective teaching patterns (Bennet & Rolheiser, 2001).

Many solutions have been proposed to solve the problem of ineffective teachers. One of the more compelling areas of research has to do with school culture. Schools operate as systems of people that form distinct cultures. One aspect of culture is that it sets norms of behavior. The individual teacher operates within a culture that encourages them to behave in certain ways and discourages them from acting in other ways. The culture can determine whether an ineffective teacher will improve (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). School culture is a key factor in ensuring improved student outcomes (Gruenert, 2000). It is therefore critical that educational leaders understand the power of culture and are effective at shaping school cultures.

## **Background**

There is a need for cultural change in schools. One of the reasons for this is that schools resist change. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) argued that “Schools are not much different than they were in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the staples that characterized education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have gone unchallenged in the 20 and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries” (p. 14). Muhammad and Cruz identified that one thing that has not changed is that the teacher is the expert, and the students are passive recipients of knowledge. The authors explained why this was the case when they noted that the educational system has socialized its educators into having and upholding certain

expectations, and most schools are not designed to make fundamental changes. Dufour et al. (2008) concluded that “neither the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’, nor any of the nonstop reform effort of the past quarter century have resulted in the quality schools vital to the future of the nation” (p. 51).

One of the reasons that change fails to occur has to do with the nature of the change attempt. Fullan (2005) stated, “The history of education reform and innovation is replete with good ideas or policies that fail to get implemented... A missing ingredient in most failed cases is the appreciation and use of what we call change knowledge” (p. 54). Fullan went on to refer to change knowledge as understanding the forces that drive significant change. Fullan (2006) argued that unless change included questions of culture, it is bound to fail. Gruenert (2000) stated that “School culture is a key factor in determining whether improvement is possible” (p. 14). Gruenert (2005) also argued that “school culture and student achievement are not divergent issues for school leaders to consider” (p. 54). If student achievement is the goal, it appears that educational leaders need to focus on mechanisms of change, one of which is altering culture. Fullan (2002) referred to this by saying, “Transforming culture, changing what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it, leads to deep lasting change” (p. 19).

### **Statement of the Issue/Problem**

Every school has a unique culture that enforces its own norms of behavior (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Socialization of these norms encourages teachers to act in certain ways. If the culture of the school encourages ineffective teaching, individual teachers will feel pressure to conform to that culture’s norms (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). School improvement without a basis in cultural change is doomed to fail or not have a significant impact (Fullan, 2006). Educational

leaders need to understand the power of culture and how to shape it to benefit students. When teachers work within an effective culture, student outcomes will improve (Kraft & Papay, 2015).

It is vital for educational leaders to understand how local culture contributes to the development of effective teachers. It is equally important to understand how to change existing school cultures. The role of the educational leader is to facilitate the best possible outcomes for the students. Cultures have been shaped over time and are difficult to change. An educational leader needs to be skilled in changing the dynamics of a school culture, as well as knowing effective methods for implementing change (Muhammad, 2009).

It is tempting to blame lack of improvement on lack of knowledge on the premise that if teachers knew better, they would do better. The solution would then be increased professional development. Fullan (2007) countered this premise by saying, “The notion that external ideas alone will result in changes in the classroom and school is deeply flawed as a theory of action” (p. 35). Knowledge alone will not bring about significant change. Nehez et al. (2022) observed that “School cultures and their adherent practices are identified as playing a decisive role in the degree of stability and change in school improvement attempts, in teacher’s professional learning and in teacher’s teaching patterns” (p. 311). The problem with educational change is that too often it does not impact school culture; however, changing school culture is not an easy task (Fullan, 2008). It is necessary to understand change management in order to bring about improved outcomes for students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this capstone will be to explore the nature of school cultures and the effects that leadership can have. It is necessary to understand the nature of culture before attempting change. This capstone paper will look at frameworks for educational leaders to help

them understand school culture, as well as how culture impacts student achievement and how to bring about positive change. It is imperative to be intentional in changing culture to impact teacher effectiveness. It takes a strong leader to shape and mold cultures (Naiker et al., 2016).

The educational leader's impact on student achievement is accomplished through the changing of school culture. Whitaker (2019) noted that "The effectiveness of the principal is the key determinant of the extent of learning that takes place in the school" (p. 14). This review aims to strengthen the effectiveness of the educational leader.

### **Research Questions**

Educational leaders need to understand how to create effective school cultures. The focus of this capstone will be on the following questions:

1. What is the impact of school culture on student achievement and teacher effectiveness?
2. What strategies and principles are effective for changing school cultures?
3. How do school-based leaders change cultures to have a positive impact on student achievement?

### **Significance of the Study**

The effects of teaching practices directly impact students (Whitaker, 2019); effective and ineffective teaching methods can impact students for years. The results of ineffective teaching can be measured by outcomes for up to three years (Muhammad, 2019). Research has shown that students with similar achievement levels can be separated by as much as 50 percentage points in three years due to the impact of ineffective teaching (Muhammad, 2009). The culture of a school determines whether teachers can improve their instructional strategies (Gruenert, 2005). School culture has the power to shape and direct instructional ability (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). If

students are in a school with a culture that is biased towards ineffective practices, they will have poorer outcomes. This puts responsibility on educational leaders to shape a culture that allows for improved student outcomes. Muhammad (2009) stated, “dysfunctional school cultures create systems that maintain the educational gap” (p. 14). This lends urgency to the need to develop more effective cultures. Given that a culture shapes the norms and behaviors of a given group, an ineffective culture will promote ineffective teachers. Teachers in an ineffective culture continue in their practices because the culture encourages and reinforces their behavior.

Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that their classroom instruction is of the highest quality. Alberta Education stated in their Teacher Quality Standard (TQS) (2020) that one of the prerequisites for a teacher is that they engage in lifelong learning to improve their teaching. Teachers are expected to build capacity to support successful outcomes for all students. Without an effective culture, teachers will conform to the expectations of local norms.

Alberta Education also has high expectations for leaders. In the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) (2020), school leaders were required to develop cultures that support the best outcomes for students. It is essential that educational leaders understand the dynamics of cultures and how to develop more positive communities.

The environment a teacher works in is essential to student success. If a school has ineffective teachers, the culture of the school has to change if the teachers are to change. Unless the culture of the school changes, the outcomes for the student will not change (Johnson, 2012). Cultures in a school have to support teacher growth and development, but cultures tend to persist and resist change without intervention (Johnson, 2012), so change has to be led by effective leaders. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) underlined the importance of educational leaders in shaping student outcomes: “We argue that an educational leader’s inability to create healthy

school culture is the primary reason school performance goes unchanged or declines and the achievement gap remains wide” (p. 14).

This issue has many implications for a wide range of stakeholders. The primary stakeholder is the student. Every student deserves the best education possible, and changing school culture will improve their outcomes (Eaker, 2020). The second group of stakeholders that is impacted are the teachers. Without effective teaching, the students will suffer achievement gaps. The third group of stakeholders is the educational leaders who have the responsibility of assessing and implementing cultural change.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this Capstone study was to explore the nature of school culture and how educational leaders can effectively implement more effective cultures. This included the impact of culture on the educational setting to include students, teachers, and educational leaders. The Capstone also reviewed change management theory as it applies to local school settings. Strategies needed in order to change culture was also researched.

### **Summary**

The area of review is school culture and its impact on student achievement. It is necessary to understand how culture impacts an educational setting. It is also important for educational leaders to know how to change a local school environment. If a school has a culture that socializes teachers towards ineffective instructional practices, the students will not have positive outcomes (Muhammad, 2019). In order to change a culture, a leader must be familiar with change management theories (Fullan, 2005). The changing of a culture is not as simple as mandating a change; systemic change needs to occur. There are many stakeholders impacted by this study, but the most important is the student. Zahed-Babelan et al. (2019) summed this up by

saying, “Leaders must shape a culture in which every teacher can make a difference, and every child can learn and in which there is a passion for, and commitment to promoting the best” (p. 138).

### **Outline of the Remainder of the Paper**

In the following sections, this Capstone considered school culture with respect to change management theories. The literature review looked at a description of school culture and its impact on teachers, at the need for cultural change, and at various change management principles as applied in a school context. These included areas such as being a resolute leader, building trust, the importance of relationships, collaboration, and the need for distributed leadership. The last section will look at some practical strategies to impact culture. These will include professional development, being intentional, and applying positive pressure. The third chapter makes recommendations and implications.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The literature review focused on aspects of school culture that have the potential to impact student achievement. School culture will be examined for its impact on individual teaching practices. Effective leadership principles with a focus on change management theory, and school culture was reviewed through this theoretical lens. The literature review looked at principles of change management that specifically apply to changing a school's culture in order to improve student outcomes. There was a focus on the need to change school culture, using change management theory, in order to improve student achievement.

### Definitions of Terms

**Change Management:** A comprehensive approach to transforming an organizations' culture (Stobierski, 2020).

**Distributed Leadership:** Leaders formally and informally sharing leadership roles within an organization (Eaker, 2020).

**Educational Leader:** Formal or informal leadership role within the school. Can refer to school administrators or to teachers as leaders (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019).

**Professional Development (PD):** Professional development (PD) was defined by Brown & Militello as "A comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving the effectiveness of teachers and principals in raising student achievement" (2016, p. 714).

**Professional Learning Communities (PLC):** DuFour et al. (2008) defined PLC as: Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.

**School Culture:** The observed patterns of behavior of teachers as they interact in the learning environment, and the norms that have evolved in schools as they relate to acceptable behavior (Gruenert, 2005).

## **Literature Review**

### **Background**

The primary goal of academic institutions should be student achievement (Dufour et al., 2008). Research has shown that a teacher's effectiveness has one of the largest impacts on individual students, as noted by Whitaker (2019): "The effectiveness of the teacher is the key determinant of the extent of learning that takes place in the classroom." Within any given school, there will be a range of effectiveness in teaching skills (Kraft & Papay, 2014). This indicates that a focus needs to be placed on improving those teachers with less effective teaching skills. The difficulty is that not all teachers develop at the same rates nor to the desired levels (Kraft & Papay, 2014). One of the reasons that some teachers improve faster than others is the nature of the school culture. Kraft and Papay (2014) reported that teachers who work in more supportive environments become more effective at raising student achievement than those who work in less supportive environments. The culture of a school plays a large part in determining the potential effectiveness of a teacher.

It might be argued that what is needed for teacher improvement is better professional development for instructional strategies. Fullan (2007) disputed the idea that simple education would be enough to raise teacher effectiveness, remarking on professional development by saying, "These activities are not useless, but they can never be powerful enough, specific enough or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school."

Educational reformers have worked for decades to shape the educational setting with current research (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Educational philosopher John Dewey called for reform to teaching methods in the early 1900s. Dewey and Hinchey (2018) stated:

...education ought to give students opportunities to discover information and ideas by their own effort in a teacher-structured environment, and to put knowledge to functional use by defining and solving problems and determining the validity and worth of ideas and theories. (p. 66)

Dewey's solution was to move from a traditional style of teaching that saw the teacher as the deliverer of knowledge to a model where the students themselves created knowledge. Over a hundred years later, many teachers still view their role as the deliverer of knowledge (Muhammad & Cruz, 2009). School districts have attempted change by mandating professional learning communities, writing programs, mathematical programs, and many others (Dufour et al., 2008). Marzano et al. (1995) stated that "one of the constants within education is that someone is always trying to change it. Many of these programs are well thought out, well-articulated, yet most are short lived" (p. 116). Research indicates that to improve teacher effectiveness, educational reformers need to focus on the contexts in which the teacher works (Papay & Kraft, 2017). In order for individuals to improve, the culture of the school has to change, as noted by Gruenert (2000): "School culture is a key factor in determining whether improvement is possible" (p. 14).

### ***Description of School Culture***

Every organization develops a unique culture over time (Gruenert, 2000). This culture can be described as the personality of the group. The culture in an individual school develops common norms or expectations for behavior (Gruenert, 2000). These norms develop methods of

rewards and punishments for the individual group member. Over time, these norms train people to act in certain ways. Nehez and Blossing (2022) stated, “culture can be understood as assumptions and values that a group have incorporated and base their actions on” (p. 311). Culture is the group personality of the staff. It gives permission for teachers to act in certain ways and not in others (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). School culture is a powerful force that impacts all who interact with it. If the culture is ineffective, it will constrain teachers’ effectiveness with their students (Papay & Kraft, 2014). Culture provides the context in which the educational process takes place. Changing school culture is the key factor in improving student outcomes by enabling teachers to become more effective (Gruenert, 2000). Grissom et al. (2021) reported that “An emerging body of research documents that the contexts in which teachers work profoundly shape their job decision and effectiveness” (p. 22).

### ***Effect of Teachers***

It is critical to build an environment in which effective teaching practices can occur (Johnson, 2012). If the culture influences teachers towards ineffective practices, there is an impact is on student achievement (Whitaker, 2019), which impact is felt for years. Sanders and Rivers (1996) reported that differences in student achievement could be as much as 50 percentage points three years after having an ineffective teacher. They also reported that the effects of teachers on student achievement are additive and cumulative. Each encounter with an ineffective teacher adds to a decline in student achievement. Muhammad (2009) reported that:

The residual effects of both very effective and ineffective teachers are measurable two years later, regardless of the effectiveness of teachers in later grades. Students who have three effective teachers or ineffective teachers in a row have vastly different achievement levels. (p. 55)

Students who have ineffective teachers are significantly impacted. Stronge et al. (2007) reported that students who encounter a less effective teacher in lower grades had lower achievement gains in reading and mathematics (2007). Schmoker (2018) also reported that students who have an effective teacher gain a great academic benefit. When a student had a high-performing teacher, they had higher academic outcomes than their peers for several years. Schmoker (2018) reported that the most effective teachers ensure that their students learn almost twice as much material as ineffective teachers. It is therefore imperative to ensure that teachers are highly effective.

It is important to understand the reason behind teacher ineffectiveness. One reason could be experience. Kraft and Papay reported that inexperienced teachers show more ineffective traits. However, it is often the inexperienced teacher who makes rapid gains in their effectiveness (Kraft & Papay, 2014). What is notable is the rate of improvement. Bennet and Rolheiser reported that there is a steep curve in a teacher's effectiveness in the first three years of teaching (2001). As teachers learn how to be more effective, they are also socialized by their environment (Walls et al., 2002). This indicates that improvement in instructional ability is possible.

However, Kraft and Papay (2014) reported that the gains teachers make early in their careers is tempered, and improvement becomes modest. Fullan (2007) warned against teachers plateauing in stating, "Student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time." What is it that stops teachers from continuously improving? One reason is that teachers teach in ways that they were taught. Gruenert and Whitaker (2019) reported that beliefs about teaching were well-formed before an individual becomes a teacher and they have socialized into a manner of teaching. Students who become teachers have had thousands of hours of instruction before they enter the profession that shapes their instructional practices. These informal assumptions about the nature of education prove to be more impactful than formal training. If the new teacher is not

placed in a strong environment, they will be socialized to ineffectiveness (Walls et al., 2002). This describes the nature of culture in educational settings. Culture is developed over time and socializes its members into teaching in certain ways (Eaker, 2020). Teachers start their careers socialized into a certain form of teaching, and the culture of their school can reinforce these practices (Eaker, 2020). The culture of the school is the decisive factor in whether improvement can occur (Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

### **Need for Cultural Change**

In order to impact teachers and students, the culture of an academic institution needs to change (Fullan et al., 2005). Gruenert (2000) stated, “If things don’t change it is because the existing culture did not allow it. Understanding what culture is and what it does allows leaders to orchestrate real change” (p. 15). Changing culture is not an easy task. Nehez and Blossing (2022) stated that “cultures seemed to be difficult for school leaders to transform” (p. 315). One of the features of a culture is that it socializes teachers to behave in certain ways (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). Cultures can be resistant to change and prove difficult for leaders to transform (Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

This resistance explains why cultural change cannot be mandated or accomplished through coercion (Muhammad, 2009). Johnson (2012) described a school where the administrators fired all of the teachers and rehired only the effective teachers. This was done to boost student achievement and had the goal of changing the school culture. However, within a year, it became clear that these personnel changes did not lead to significant improvements. Johnson (2012) concluded that “Changing the people without changing the context in which they work is not likely to substantially improve the school” (p. 111). Fullan (2015) concluded that

standard-based reform that does not take cultural change into account will not work. It is not enough to legislate or demand change; what is needed is change in the culture (Fullan, 2000).

Unfortunately, improving a school climate is difficult (Fullan, 2005). Educating teachers or attempting to restructure an environment seems to make little difference in outcomes (Fullan, 2000). What is needed for true change to occur is application of change management theory (Fullan et al., 2005). Change management theory is a comprehensive approach to dealing with organizational change (Stobierski, 2020). It acknowledges the difficulty of true change and looks beyond mandates or simple fixes. Levin and Fullan (2008) stated: “sustained improvement in student outcomes requires a sustained effort to change school and classroom practices, not just structures such as governance and accountability” (p. 291).

The heart of achieving true change is found in changing the cultures of educational settings (Gruenert, 2000). This takes a broader and longer-term approach than simply mandating improvement or working with individual teachers. It is necessary for educational leaders to understand how to bring significant change to their organizations (Fullan, 2005). When the culture changes, the individual teachers will also change. Fullan et al. (2005) claimed:

The history of educational reform and innovation is replete with good ideas or policies that fail to get implemented or that are successful in one situation but not in another. A missing ingredient in most failed cases is appreciation and use of what we call change knowledge: understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice. The presence of change knowledge does not guarantee success, but its absence ensures failure. (p. 54)

The rest of this section is devoted to identifying key changes for educational leaders to implement from a change management theory perspective. These are the things a leader needs to know or focus on in order to bring systemic change to school culture.

### **Change Management Applied to School Culture.**

#### ***Leadership.***

Leadership is essential to changing school culture (Whitaker, 2019). The impact of a leader in an educational setting is critical. Much research has been devoted to the idea that school leadership is a crucial component of educational reform (Khalifa et al., 2016). While the teacher may have the strongest impact on learning in an individual classroom, the school leader is the key factor to the amount of learning that can happen in the school (Whitaker, 2019). Grissom et al. (2021) reported that “the impact of having an effective principal on student leadership is nearly as large as having a similarly effective teacher” (p. 13). The impact of the leader is not directly related to the students, but rather on the effect it has on the teachers. The effectiveness of a leader is more important than the effectiveness of a classroom teacher because the leader will shape and mold teachers (Grissom et al., 2020). Powerful leaders have the ability to change school culture in order to improve teacher effectiveness (Eaker, 2020). This style of leadership benefits student achievement. Successful school leadership puts student learning at the center of everything the school does (Shannon & Bylsma, 2009). The research calls for strong leaders who are able to change the culture of the school in order to benefit student achievement.

Effective leadership in changing a school culture is key to student achievement (Grissom et al., 2020). Leadership that attempts to change culture is difficult work (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Effective leadership has the potential to change educational cultures, resulting in increased teacher effectiveness (Fiore, 2000). Fiore (2000) reported that “As recent research has

shown the principal is the means of access to creating and sustaining positive school cultures” (p. 11). People’s behavior is not permanent, it can be changed if you alter the culture (Fullan, 2011). This implies that instructional practices can be changed through changing culture. An effective leader will change behavior by making it easy to realize the effective strategies (Fullan, 2011). It is not enough for the leader to be an effective administrator or to bring in programs or professional development (Fullan, 2007).

It might be tempting to think that mandating change or restructuring will improve student outcomes. However, Eaker (2020) noted that “Leaders attempting to improve their district or school by focusing exclusively on structural change rather than cultural change will be disappointed in the fruits of their labor” (p. 14). According to these researchers, an effective leader needs to embody change management principles. Structural changes may be necessary, but unless they are accompanied by meaningful cultural change, they will not have an impact on student outcomes (Eaker, 2020).

### ***Vision***

Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) stated, “Many school leaders will espouse their mission and vision as the driving forces in their schools. We argue that it is more about the culture of the school, and this culture will interpret the mission and vision despite the efforts of any committee” (p. 179). Vision is important to effectively implementing change management theories (Fullan, 2005). An educational leader needs to have a clear vision of what the future will look like, and this vision has to be clearly communicated to the stakeholders (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). Vision is critical; however, it needs to be supported by cultural change (Wilson, 2008). Fullan et al. (2005) defined vision as engaging people’s moral purposes. Moral purpose in educational change is about improving society through improving educational systems and thus

the learning of all citizens (Fullan et al., 2005). This statement elevates the purpose of vision. In education, moral purpose is focused on student achievement (Fullan et al., 2005).

A moral purpose as a vision has the potential to unite a school in purpose (Eaker, 2020). Muhammad (2005) identified common elements of an effective purpose. Schools that had adopted a common purpose developed a common vocabulary around the goal. Staff members were engaged in problem-solving around the common goal, and were skilled in that vision and goal. When staff have a common language, are allowed to problem-solve, and their capacity meets demand, they will have high buy-in to the vision (Muhammad, 2005). The moral purpose provides the motivation for effective change to occur (Eaker, 2020).

### ***Resolute Leaders***

Culture generally works to inhibit change (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). School culture can be difficult to change and is not an easy task. Gruenert (2000) remarked that changing a school culture could take as long as five to seven years, meaning that an educational leader will need to have determination and resolution in order to bring about meaningful change (Eaker, 2020). Administrators have myriad duties to fulfill, and it is easy to focus on immediate matters and lose sight of the critical task of changing school culture. Changing culture is a demanding task and requires leaders who are driven by resolute purpose (Fullan, 2011). Effective leaders are driven by a deep purpose to bring about change, not simply being good managers (Eaker, 2020). Leaders who want to bring about change need a deep sense of purpose and an unrelenting drive to complete the task (Fullan, 2011). This resolution has the impact of mobilizing others in the educational setting. As others see this long-term determination, they will be motivated to change (Fullan, 2011).

Nehez & Blossing (2022) reported that “Cultures seem difficult for school leaders to transform. Existing cultures can restrict principal’s improvement efforts” (p. 320). Culture is set up to discourage change (Gruenert, 2000). One of the reasons for this is that people working together tend to build a group-think mentality, which enforces norms of behavior within the group context (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). In order to continue in the face of opposition, the educational leader needs to be resolute and have a moral purpose. The moral purpose is the motivation that allows an educator to continue the work they are doing (Fullan, 2006).

This moral purpose is centered on the need to improve student outcomes in the belief that things must change in order to improve. This moral purpose allows the leader to have a correct focus of what needs to change, which Eaker (2020) stated as, “For educational institutions, the primary focus of an effective culture must be linked to enhancing the learning of both students and adults” (p. 14). Waters et al. (2004) identified that moral purpose is linked to second-order change. First-order change is superficial change such as restructuring and does not impact culture (Waters et al., 2004). Second-order change creates a fundamental difference in an organization by changing the culture (Waters et al., 2004). Without a clear purpose and resolution, second-order change is not likely to occur (Waters et al., 2004). Change management theory starts with a resolute leader who has a clear moral purpose (Fullan et al., 2005).

The educational leader has the most impact on developing the culture of the school. Fiore (2000) stated, “The principal is the means of access to creating sustaining positive school cultures” (p. 11). Educational leaders need to understand their role in changing a school culture in order to improve student outcomes. Zahed-Babelan et al. (2019) concluded, “There is a causal relationship between the role of the leader and organizational learning. Leaders use culture to shape employee engagement and effectiveness” (p. 141).

### ***Relationships***

A key tenet of change management is that change occurs through relationships. Fullan (2002) remarked on this by saying, “The single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve schools get better.” Fullan (2002) reported that focusing on relationships can’t be just about boosting achievement in the short term; it is a way of improving outcomes for years to come. The effective leader knows the type of relationship they need to build with their staff (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). One of the key relationship skills is trust-building (Crow, 2021) because change happens within people, not organizations (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). In order for individuals to participate in the change management process, they will need to trust the leaders (Crow, 2021). Trust builds well-established relationships that connect teachers to the change process (Fullan, 2002).

One might think that in order to develop relationships and trust, a leader has to be charismatic. However, Fullan (2011) stated, “What should strike you is not the charismatic brilliance of leaders but their careful entry, listening and engaging in fact finding and joint problem solving” (p. 64). Fullan described the type of relationship needed in change management. According to Fullan (2011) leaders need to start relationships carefully, become attentive listeners, and work collaboratively to solve problems. This approach to leadership allows the staff to feel that they are part of the process and develops trust.

One factor of professional relationships is the balance between collegiality and professionalism (Muhamad & Cruz, 2019). In order for trust to be established, the teachers must feel confident that administrative duties are being accomplished (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) reported that leaders need to invest in building relationships and maintain professional rigor at the same time. This aspect of building relationships can be

considered task-focused leadership that allows clarity, predictability, and clear expectations (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019), and this aspect of administration needs to be balanced with relational skills (Muhammad, 2019).

### ***Collaboration***

Gruenert (2000) noted the importance of collaboration by stating, “Collaborative cultures seem to be the best setting for student achievement, thus affirming the literature on collaborative school cultures.” Collaboration is important because no one individual has the range of skills and knowledge that will solve every classroom problem (Grissom et al. 2021). Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) argued that leadership tasks can fall into two broad groups: solidarity and solidity. Solidarity is the work of building relationships and attending to the group dynamics of a staff (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018). Eaker (2020) reported that focusing on collaborations is the most important way leaders can impact student achievement. However, simply building a congenial atmosphere will not have an impact on student outcomes (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018). An effective change management leader also needs to focus on solidity. Solidity, according to Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018), is using precise methods to structure and guide collaboration among the staff. It is not enough to build relationships; these relationships must guide change (Fullan, 2006). Collaboration has the potential to both change school culture and increase student achievement, as Waldron and McLeskey (2010) reported:

Research has revealed that a collaborative culture or community leads to higher levels of trust and respect among colleagues, improved professional satisfaction, improved instructional practices, better outcomes for all students and school change that is maintained over time. (p. 63)

This creates urgency for schools to create collaborative cultures. Change management calls for the use of collaboration in shaping organizations (Fullan, 2006). The power of collaboration, when exercised properly, requires sustained attention from many different individuals (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Collaboration promotes mutual interaction across all levels around the same goal, which creates the possibility of creating cultural change (Levin & Fullan, 2008).

Schools already tend to operate as communities (Fiore, 2000). Embedded in the school culture is the idea of groups of people working together (Fiore, 2000). Even if this is only seen inside the classroom, where the teacher builds community with a group of students, the notion of community is familiar to teachers (Fiore, 2000). Collaboration between teachers is extremely important, as noted by Liu et al. (2021): “There is evidence that professional collaboration among teachers likely increases teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction” (p. 433). Collaboration, when conducted properly, has the potential to provide teachers with an environment that supports change (Fullan, 2006). Teachers learning from each other improves both teaching practice and the school culture. Teachers who worked in a collaborative atmosphere are much more likely to stay in their school and in the profession (Johnson, 2012).

The structure of a collaboration is critical to its success (Gruenert, 2000). Teachers cannot be forced to collaborate (Gruenert, 2000). Leaders cannot simply mandate collaboration or impose a collaboration process that is overtly controlled by the leader (Grissom et al., 2021). Grissom et al. (2021) noted that “Collaboration is a key element of productive school climate. It must be voluntary, co-equal and working toward a common goal” (p. 66).

Collaboration needs to focus on instructional practice, as noted by Gruenert (2000): “The strength of collaboration comes from time structured for teachers to have meaningful discussions

about improving their practice to share their expertise” (p. 14). The starting point of effective collaboration is that it is structured and focused on improvement (Papay & Kraft, 2014). The change leader provides the structure and focus that allows teachers to collaborate meaningfully. Teachers need guidance and support in creating effective collaboration structures (Papay & Kraft, 2014).

Fullan (2011) identified four core elements of a collaborative culture. The first is focus. Leaders need to set a small number of core goals for the school to work on (Fullan, 2011). The second element is forming a guiding coalition, which is a form of distributed leadership that allows teachers to take ownership (Fullan, 2011). The third element is building institutional capacity. Collaboration around a central goal will need to be supported by instructional leadership (Fullan, 2011). This building capacity can take the form of professional development or providing appropriate resources. The fourth principle is that of building individual capacity (Fullan, 2011). Once the organization is working towards a common goal, it will be necessary to identify which individual staff members need additional support. Fullan (2011) stated that “the goal of having a collaborative culture is not that employees will do the work for a resolute leader, but rather that they become *collectively* engaged in work that is also meaningful to them” (p. 94).

This type of collaboration involves teachers working together and observing one another’s practices (Fullan, 2007). Teachers often find themselves without the time to observe teaching practices and engage in meaningful pedagogical discussions, which Fullan (2007) identified as the practice of privatization. The educational leader needs to provide a structure where the teachers can plan, observe, and discuss their teaching practices together (Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). This type of collaboration helps shape a culture that impacts student achievement. Gruenert (2000) identified components of successful collaboration in saying, “The

strength of collaboration comes from time structured for teachers to have meaningful discussions about improving their practice and sharing their expertise” (p. 14).

Professional learning communities (PLC) are a type of structure that employs collaboration to increase student outcomes (Dufour et al., 2008). When constructed properly, a professional learning community is “educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 14). PLC can give a structure for teachers to effectively collaborate. However, DuFour et al. (2008) argued that schools adopt a PLC model but do not adopt the practices that characterize effective PLC. DuFour et al. (2008) went on to state, “collaboration does not lead to improved results unless people are focused on the right issues” (p. 15). In order for PLC or other collaborative practices to have an impact on student achievement, the culture needs to be changed (Nehez & Blossing, 2022)

Implementing a culture of collaboration is important, as it will break down a system that encourages isolation. Schmoker (2006) noted, “Isolation ensures that highly unprofessional practices are tolerated and thus proliferate” (p. 24). One aspect of change management is that professionals work in teams. Fullan (2007) referred to the need to create communities of teachers as deprivatization, calling for systemic changes to the notion of teacher privacy and the ability to work behind closed doors. Privacy refers to the idea that teachers can work in isolation (Fullan, 2007). On the other hand, collaboration forces teachers to observe others, participate in debate about the quality of their instruction, and form common understandings of student achievement (Schmoker, 2006). The change leader needs to bring about a culture of collaboration in order to defuse a culture of privacy. Johnson (2012) identified that strategies based on individual teachers’ needs rather than the school culture do little to improve school outcomes.

The challenge for the leader will be to find the time for teachers to collaborate and observe each other (Muhammad & Cruz, 2018). This presents a challenge to the educational leader, as teachers frequently have very tight schedules and little flexibility for collaboration (Reeves, 2020). The change leader must take the lead to ensure that collaboration happens (Reeves, 2020). This requires commitment on the part of the leader to find ways of ensuring collaboration without adding to a teacher's workload (Muhammad & Cruz, 2018).

### ***Distributed Leadership***

Another key factor in change management is that of distributed leadership (Eaker, 2020). Distributed leadership refers to the development of "teacher leaders", whereby principals share their leadership responsibilities with teachers (Fullan, 2002). This is accomplished by allowing teachers to share in the decision-making process. Teacher leaders take on roles in the school and assist in instructional leadership (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010), which is critical to change management theory (Grissom et al., 2021). Fullan (2002) claimed "An organization cannot flourish, at least not for long, on the actions of the top leader alone" (p. 20). Organizations that want to succeed need to have leaders at many levels. A principal's success in changing culture will consist of creating leaders within the school culture (Grissom et al., 2021).

Distributed leadership has an impact on student achievement (Naiker et al., 2016).

Waldron and McLeskey (2010) noted why distributed leadership was important:

When leadership is distributed it is assumed that teachers and other school personnel will take leadership roles and share in decision making regarding changes in instructional practices...This form of leadership and decision making leads to increased teacher trust and buy in for change initiatives as well as increased student achievement. (p. 63)

Schools that embrace an expansive form of teacher leadership see student outcomes improve because this allows teachers to take responsibility for student outcomes (Naiker et al., 2016). This creates more of an impetus for change than mandating change. Distributed leadership also acknowledges that no single individual has the broad range of skills and knowledge needed to change a school (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). It allows for true collaboration to occur as people with various strengths work together (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Eaker (2020) remarked that “Collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership, primarily through the influence on teachers’ motivation” (p. 14).

Whitaker (1995) noted that every school has teachers that are widely respected by the rest of the school. Identifying these people and giving them formal leadership roles within the school is an effective way to influence internal change (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). Effective principals gather input from their teacher leaders before making decisions for the school, which leads to teacher leaders feeling a sense of ownership over changes occurring within a school (Naiker, et al., 2016). If these informal leaders have a sense of ownership, they will use their influence within the school to promote new ideas (Gruenert, & Whitaker, 2017).

The principal plays a critical role in effective school improvement (Zahed-Babelan, 2019); however, principals will not be able to impact real change while teachers are operating in isolation (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Strong learning communities are more likely to develop when principals are able to share control and leadership (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). The educational leader’s role in changing culture is to nurture teacher leaders, provide focus and direction, and focus on instructional leadership (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). In doing so, the leader will enable many other leaders to take on the established vision.

### **Strategies to Achieving Cultural Change**

It is clear that changing school culture is the key to changing student outcomes, as noted by Nehez and Blossing (2021): “The culture of the local school is a decisive factor in school improvement” (p. 321). As previously discussed, change management principles such as being a resolute leader, building relationships, focusing on collaboration, and distributed leadership are key to developing a new culture. The following section discusses some practical strategies to implement changes in school culture.

#### ***Professional Development***

Professional development (PD) was defined by Brown & Militello (2016) as “A comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving the effectiveness of teachers and principals in raising student achievement” (p. 709). PD is a critical element in changing a school culture (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). When leaders articulate a vision and expectations for change, they need to ensure that the staff has the skills needed to perform in the new culture. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) stated, “Not knowing how to perform a task while simultaneously being held accountable for doing so makes the followers feel frustrated and anxious” (p. 64). Educational leaders should not assume that people within a school have the ability to make desired changes without providing the how (Eaker, 2020).

Grissom et al. (2021) identified the need for effective PD in order to change a culture (2021); however, not all PD is an effective in changing a culture (Fullan, 2007). Many teachers and principals view PD as something that is done to them, rather than an ongoing process of growth (Brown & Militello, 2016). When PD is seen in this light, it can lead to resistance to change and lack of growth. PD has to move from the traditional model of knowledge delivery to

one of knowledge-building (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). This idea of PD is one that Fullan et al. (2005) identified as capacity-building.

Capacity-building is defined by Fullan and Levin (2008) as “any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning” (p. 209). Capacity-building develops an entire staff’s knowledge and skills, not just those of individual teachers (Fullan et al., 2005). As the collective staffs’ capacities are raised, their motivation to participate in change initiatives increases (Eaker, 2020). For change management, capacity-building is not about the transmission of knowledge, but rather creating opportunities for knowledge-building (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Transmitting knowledge can be one component of successful PD. However, if that knowledge is not applied to building group capacity, its impact will not be seen on student outcomes (Levin & Fullan, 2008). One method of capacity-building is seen by implementing PD through teacher teams and collaboration (Eaker, 2020).

For knowledge to build group capacity, the knowledge has to be created within the group context. Fullan (2006) encouraged leaders to participate in deliberative doing, which refers to the opportunity to learn in the context of a local school. The problem with traditional PD is that there is little opportunity for teachers to learn the concepts in the settings in which they actually work (Eaker, 2020). PD needs to include teachers practicing concepts in their classroom while being observed by their colleagues (Fullan, 2006). Cultures do not change from information being shared; rather, they change by deliberately practicing new concepts in context (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Gruenert and Whitaker (2018) claimed that the best PD comes from another teacher. The best source of learning is practice in context because this has the potential to change the culture of a school (Levin & Fullan, 2008). PD has to be connected to intentional practice. Fullan (2007)

reported on the need for learning in context by stating, “Student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time” (p. 35).

### ***Being Intentional***

Intentional practice is the key factor in any learning method for change management leaders (Fullan, 2011). Effective leaders cause people to put theory into practice, as this leads to new ways of thinking (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2018). When teachers connect learning with results, they will be much more likely to use the knowledge given (Fullan, 2011). Practicing new knowledge in context needs to be directed by change leaders who give structure and goals to the experience (Johnson, 2012). As teachers practice new skills, they can see their effectiveness, which leads to greater capacity and willingness to change (Fullan, 2011).

Change leaders also need to be intentional with respect to staff (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). In any given school, there will be a range of effectiveness among the staff (Johnson, 2012). According to Gruenert & Whitaker (2017), in an ineffective school culture, effective teachers will participate in a culture of isolation. A change leader needs to identify these effective teachers intentionally and build what Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) call “islands of effective teachers” (p. 24). The authors stated that a principal should know who the effective and ineffective teachers are (2017). Then, the principal needs to work with these islands of effective teachers as an intentional strategy to change the culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). The impact is to build distributed leadership focused on effectiveness. The intention is to use effective teachers to create change within the organization (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017).

### ***Positive Pressure***

Culture relies on peer pressure, which is the force used to maintain the status quo (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). Culture will resist change and uses peer pressure to enforce norms

and behaviors (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). An effective change management leader will use positive peer pressure to change culture, as noted by Fullan (2006): “Positive pressure is pressure that motivates, that is palpably fair and reasonable and does come accompanied by resources for capacity building” (p. 9). This pressure is not necessarily about telling people what to do; it is about creating a new culture. This is accomplished by modelling the actions of effective teachers (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017), which then starts to set new norms within the culture. The path to a new culture is found in intentionally identifying effectiveness, praising it, and using the effective ones to shape a new culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017).

### **Summary**

The literature is clear on the impact of school culture on student achievement. School culture determines the level of instructional effectiveness within a local school (Eaker, 202). The culture influences teacher effectiveness by pressuring its members to conform to group norms of behavior, which impact how teaching is performed (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). The impact of a teacher on student learning is significant. If the culture of the school does not support effective instructional practices, student achievement will never reach its full potential (Muhammad & Cruz, 2019). There is a deep need for cultural change to occur within local schools in order to impact student learning. Mandated programs and hierarchical leadership will not change the culture (Hargreaves & Dennis, 2020). For student achievement to improve, it is necessary to change the culture of a school.

In order to bring about systemic change in an organization, it is necessary to understand the forces of change (Fullan et al., 2005). This understanding is often called change management theory and can be applied to educational settings. Leadership is a key principle in effective change in school settings. The leadership of a school has a large impact on the outcomes for the

students (Zahed-Babelan, 2019). This is because the leader impacts the teachers, who in turn impact the students. If there is effective leadership, a principal can make significant changes to student outcomes by focusing on instructional leadership (Zahed-Babelan, 2019).

This type of leadership is not easy, and a leader will have to be resolute to bring about change (Fullan, 2011). Change can take some time to occur, and it will take patience and determination to succeed. An effective change leader also knows that they have to build trust and relationships.

Change does not occur because of programs or PD brought into the school setting (Eaker, 2020). Real change happens through teachers learning and collaborating in teams. Teachers need to break the cycle of isolation and examine their practices in well-designed teacher teams (Schmoker, 2006). Leaders need to give structure and guidance to teacher collaboration. Change management leaders also need to be dedicated to the notion of distributed leadership (Eaker, 2020). Leaders need to cultivate “teacher leaders” and allow them control in the school setting. This allows ownership and buy-in with any change taking place.

There are some general strategies to ensure cultural change. The first is that of effective PD, which has to be linked to the practice of classroom teaching (Eaker, 2020). The most learning that occurs happens when teachers are doing and examining their practice with colleagues. Change management leaders also need to be intentional about the change they are attempting to achieve (Fullan et al., 2005). Finally, change management leaders need to exert positive peer pressure, as culture is built around the forces of peer pressure, and in order to change the culture, it is necessary to understand and apply this pressure (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). When attempting change, it is important to identify effective teachers and use them to build systems of positive pressure.

### **Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions**

#### **Summary of Findings**

Chapter Two reviewed research on the links between school culture and student achievement. The research indicates that the two most influential factors on a student's achievement are the classroom teacher and the school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). Individual teachers vary in their effectiveness in the classroom, and improving the effectiveness of teachers will impact the outcomes of students (Johnson, 2012). Chapter Two identified that the impact of leadership on student outcomes is significant (Hargreaves & Dennis, 2020). The impact of the school leader is most profound when leadership changes the culture of the school (Eaker, 2020). The literature review identified that the culture of the school is the force that socializes teachers into certain teaching practices (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Fullan (2002) stated, "We need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools" (p. 18). It is not enough to attempt to change individual teachers; what is needed is a cultural change. The research findings identified that undertaking a cultural change involves understanding change management principles and cannot be based on mere restructuring (Eaker, 2020). Educational leaders need to focus on change management principles in order to transform cultures that will improve student outcomes (Fullan et al., 2005). Chapter Two identified one change management principle that is effective in cultural change as collaborative teams (Hargreaves & Dennis, 2020). Collaboration counters the culture of isolation by allowing teachers to observe and evaluate teaching in practice (Schmoker, 2006).

Chapter Three focused on the implications of the research and several recommendations for effective change management in educational settings.

## **Implications**

### ***Students***

Students' outcomes are impacted by the effectiveness of their teachers (Johnson, 2012). In order to have all students succeed at their highest levels, teachers need to be as effective as possible (Grissom et al., 2021). The culture of a local school has an impact on whether all students can succeed, as noted by Muhammad (2009): "Dysfunctional school cultures create systems that maintain the achievement gap" (p. 14). Perhaps the largest impact of ineffective teaching is in the area of disadvantaged students. Muhammad (2009) identified students of race and students who live in poverty are far more likely not to graduate, concluding that "The youth who need education the most to provide a catalyst for creating positive change in their lives are those who persistently achieve at the lowest levels in our schools" (p. 7). Johnson (2012) noted that teachers are the most important factor in student outcomes, and that disadvantaged students are especially dependent on their teachers for positive outcomes.

Nehez and Blossing (2022) identified school culture as being a key reason that change does not happen. Schools need to establish a culture where it is expected that every child can and will excel (Zahed-Babelan, 2019). Educational institutions need to have as their main goal that the learning of all students is paramount (Eaker, 2020). This focus will depend on the implementation of a culture that supports this goal. Cultures form the basis for how teachers think and act in school. Schools need a culture that allows all students to succeed.

### ***Teachers***

Crow (2012) remarked, “I believe that teachers teach the best they know how” (p. 17). Kraft and Papay (2014) noted significant differences in teacher effectiveness. Teachers make the most gains in their effectiveness early in their careers, which is associated with experience (Kraft & Papay, 2014). However, as teachers continue in their careers, it is the culture of the school that determines how much more improvement will occur (Kraft & Papay, 2014). Nehez and Blossing (2022) stated “School cultures and their adherent practices are identified as playing a decisive role in the degree of stability and change in school improvement attempts” (p. 316).

One reason that culture plays such an important role in the effectiveness of teachers is that cultures work hard to maintain the status quo (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019). Without the proper culture, teachers will be socialized into ineffective teaching practices (Gruenert, 2000). Cultures can restrain effective teachers in their attempts to be effective in their classrooms (Kraft & Papay, 2017).

### ***Leaders***

School leaders have a significant impact on the outcomes of students, according to Whitaker (2019) when he stated, “The effectiveness of the principal is the key determinant of the extent of learning that takes place in the school” (p. 24). Grissom et al. (2021) noted that “the impact of having an effective principal on student achievement is nearly as large as the effect of having a similarly effective teacher” (p. 13). The effectiveness of the leader depends on the culture they shape within the school (Khalifa, 2016). The school leader is the means of creating cultures that socialize effective teaching practices (Naiker et al., 2016).

In order to implement a new culture, leaders will need to know change management theory (Fullan et al., 2005). This is sufficiently crucial that Fullan et al. (2005) stated, “The presence of change knowledge does not guarantee success, but its absence ensures failure” (p.

54). The process of change is difficult, and change management allows for a comprehensive approach to culture change (Fullan et al., 2005). One implication of the research is that creating and maintaining an effective school culture should be the highest priority for leaders (Eaker, 2020).

In order to attempt change, leaders have the option of either reculturing or restructuring (Grissom et al., 2021). Restructuring refers to changing structures such as policies, procedures, and programs (Eaker, 2020). Leaders need to be adept at reculturing, or creating atmospheres conducive to effective practices (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). One implication for educational leaders is that they need to drive the change process (Dufour et al., 2008). Many change initiatives have failed due to the principal lacking the needed reculturing skills (Dufour et al.).

## **Recommendations**

### ***Collaboration***

The first recommendation is that educational leaders need to focus on cultures of collaboration. Gruenert (2000) stated, “Collaborative cultures seem to be the best setting for student achievement” (p. 15). One of the reasons that collaboration is critical is that it allows teachers the opportunity to observe and share teaching practices (Liu et al., 2021). Teachers working and planning together allows for enhanced instructional practices. The research highlights this by stating that collaboration allows for data-sharing and complex problem-solving (Grissom et al., 2021). One of the powerful drives of collaboration is that it allows teachers to receive professional feedback and learn from each other in practice (Kraft & Papay, 2017). Collaboration is an element of change management theory and reinforces cultural change (Fullan, 2011). Working together powerfully impacts change; however, it is not just enough to have collaborative time. Collaboration has to be structured in such a way that teachers are

focusing on analyzing their professional practice in order to improve student results (Dufour et al., 2008).

One structure that emphasizes collaboration as an improvement tool is PLC, as noted by Dufour et al. (2008): “Professional learning communities offer an infrastructure to create the supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning” (p. 16). Professional learning communities have much potential to impact educational cultures. However, Fullan (2006) argued against the use of PLC as a simple measure of restructuring. Simply initiating a PLC program without attending to change management theory will not bring about the desired results. Fullan (2006) cautioned that schools must use change knowledge when implementing PLC or any change initiative.

One of the main benefits of collaboration, however implemented, is that it works to remove isolation from the teaching practice. Muhammad (2009) reported that teachers are much more effective when they are not isolated. Teachers often work without the opportunity to watch other’s practice and have that practice evaluated by peers. Fullan (2007) refers to the need to remove isolation as de-privatization. Eaker (2020) reported that teachers need to be open to collaboration in order to be most effective. Collaboration combats ineffective teaching by compelling teachers to observe teaching practices and reflect on the quality of their instruction (Schmoker, 2006).

### ***Distributed Leadership***

The second recommendation to come from the research is that leaders need to implement distributed leadership in order to impact cultural change. Grissom et al. (2021) reported “We have found that distributed leadership is indispensable in school change efforts” (p. 66). Distributed leadership acknowledges that no single person, including the leader, has the skills or

knowledge necessary to effect school change (Grissom et al., 2021). Collective leadership allows teachers to take on leadership roles and share in the decision-making process, which encourages cultural change (Grissom et al., 2021). This style of leadership is critical to change management, as it allows for many participants to be involved in the process. Waldron and McLeskey (2010) identified distributed leadership as being crucial to developing change. Distributed leadership is important because it leads to increased trust and motivation to engage in cultural change (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Trust and motivation can have powerful impacts on organizational culture and lead to increased student achievement (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Fullan et al. (2005) identified collective leadership as one of the powerful drivers of change management when they stated, “Leadership, to be effective, must be spread throughout the organization” (p. 57). Utilizing change management to effect cultural change is dependent upon developing distributed leadership (Fullan et al., 2005). Change management takes a long-term approach that acknowledges that development of leaders is key to the future of any organization. Fullan et al. (2005) claimed “The main mark of a school principal at the end of his or her tenure is not just that individual’s impact on student achievement, but rather how many leaders are left behind who can go even further” (p. 57).

Dufour et al. (2008) noted that principals are essential to change efforts when they stated, “No reform effort, however worth, survives a principal’s indifference or opposition” (p. 302). However, this does not mean that teachers cannot play a role in innovating distributed leadership. Dufour et al. (2008) encouraged any educator who is interested in school improvement to take responsibility for leadership. In fact, there is a deep need for educators to be leaders within a culture. Dufour et al. (2008) noted that many educators are quick to assign responsibility for change to others. Leadership is not just an official role that belongs to one or two people within a

school. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) argued that many educators falsely believe that leadership belongs to administration, calling for all to engage in leadership when they stated, “It is not exclusive to school and district administrators but for any adults, especially teachers, seeking to change adult behaviors to increase schools’ and districts’ productivity” (p. 117).

### ***Effective Professional Development***

A final recommendation centers on the need for implementing PD that is effective. Grissom et al. (2021) reported that one way principals can change a school culture is through proper PD. Schools can fall into the trap of assuming that traditional PD will solve current problems. Fullan (2005) highlighted the detriments of ineffective professional development by stating, “The notion that external ideas alone will result in changes in the classroom and school is deeply flawed as a theory of action” (p. 58). Fullan (2005) continued to note that traditional forms of PD, including those that meet the highest standards of adult learning, are not powerful enough to change instruction or culture. What is needed is for teachers to learn by practicing new knowledge in their classrooms. Fullan (2005) called for teachers to learn in context when he stated, “The problem is that there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they actually work” (p. 58). Dufour et al. (2008) acknowledged that most organizations place an emphasis on training rather than doing, arguing that “the single most powerful strategy for eliminating the knowing-doing gap and developing deeper understanding is to learn by doing (p. 414). PD that is not immediately put into professional context will not have the desired impact. For this reason, Eaker (2020) called for effective PD to be embedded in classroom practice.

Fullan (2011) argued that the best manner of learning is by deliberative practice, as this experience engages and reshapes the brain. This type of learning is done in the context

collaborative context. Schmoker (2006) identified traditional PD with reinforcing the culture of isolation. When PD is presented without any implementation in team-based efforts, the result is to encourage teachers to continue in isolation (Schmoker, 2006). Learning in isolation does not allow for true evaluation of practice. Eaker (2020) identified teacher collaboration as an effective model of PD. Not all models of PD are based on the traditional delivery of knowledge, as some countries have eliminated traditional PD in favor of in-context learning (Schmoker, 2006). Forms of PD that are based on teachers in a team refining their lessons in collaborative practice have greater impact on student learning (Schmoker, 2006).

Fullan et al. (2005) claimed that “Successful change involves learning during implementation. One of the most powerful drivers of change involves learning from peers” (p. 56). Learning with others reinforces instructional practices. This type of PD aligns with the implementation of PLC (Dufour et al., 2008). In a PLC model, teachers are responsible for their own learning and engage in collaborative collective inquiry (Dufour et al., 2008). This style of PD is dependent on leadership that provides a clear vision and commitment to improvement (Dufour et al., 2008).

## **Conclusions**

Bruce Cockburn, a Canadian songwriter and performer, wrote a song with the lyric, “The trouble with normal is it only gets worse” (Cockburn, 1983). While Cockburn was referencing social issues, the lyrics can also apply to the education world. Muhammad and Cruz (2019) claimed that if things remain as they are, fewer students will receive the education to be prepared for life. The implication is that schools and education systems need to improve to meet the needs of students better. This is not a new challenge, as over a hundred years ago, John Dewey called for reforms to the way education was conducted. Dewey called for educators to move from a

traditional model of teaching to note that encourages teaching as an inquiry mindset (Dewey & Hinchey, 2018). Dewey's call was based on the belief that all students can learn at high levels, a claim that is also at the heart of PLC (Dufour et al., 2008).

The trouble with change is that it is exceedingly difficult to implement (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). One of the reasons that change is hard to achieve has to do with the nature of culture (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2017). The culture of a school creates norms that dictate how teachers operate (Gruenert, 2000). Cultural change is needed because focusing on individuals does little to improve student outcomes (Johnson, 2020). What is needed is a change in culture to ensure that the culture supports effective teaching practices.

In order to impact cultural change, leaders need to become more focused on changing cultures, which can be achieved through implementing change management principles (Fullan et al., 2005). Leaders have the choice of restricting schools by mandating programs or attempting to re-culture a school (Eaker, 2020). Re-culturing a school will involve change management practices such as collaboration and distributed leadership (Eaker, 2020). Collaboration is a powerful change management principle that allows teachers to learn in context (Fullan, 2011). Learning in context allows teachers to evaluate their practices and improve their instructional abilities, thus impacting student outcomes (Eaker, 2020). One powerful model for creating cultural change in the area of collaboration is in the implementation of PLC (Eaker, 2020).

Students deserve the best education that educators can deliver. This is even more crucial for students who come to our institutions from disadvantaged situations (Muhammad, 2009). In order to create equity for all students, schools need cultures that promote the most effective teaching practices. This will require leaders who are able to effect cultural change to impact student achievement (Khalifa et al., 2016). The key to cultural change is effective leadership or,

as Muhammad and Cruz (2019) stated, “How leaders decide to act and interact with others will ultimately determine whether their organizations continuously improve or fail” (p. 126).

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