DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 968 RC 014 369

AUTHOR Flanagan, Kathleen R.; Trueblood, Cecil R.
TITLE Improving the Climate in Rural Schools through an Individualized Staff Development Program.
PUB DATE Oct 83
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rural Education Association (Manhattan, KS, October 16-18, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Attitude Measures; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Feedback; *Inservice Education; Job Satisfaction; Measurement Techniques; Needs Assessment; Parent Attitudes; Program Design; Program Development; *Rural Schools; School Effectiveness; *Staff Development; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Attitude Toward Inservice Scale (Trueblood et al); CFK Ltd School Climate Profile (Fox et al); Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (Bentley and Rempel); Survey of Effective School Processes (IDEA)

ABSTRACT

School climate is defined, four instruments used to assess various dimensions of school climate are described, and implications of a school climate profile for developing an individualized staff development program in a rural school setting are discussed. Developed from the professional literature, the definition of school climate includes the values, beliefs, and attitudes of school community members as reflected in the institutional patterns, processes, and behavioral practices utilized in the school across time. A positive school climate is seen as a platform upon which productive learning and teacher job satisfaction are built. The four instruments to assess school climate described are: the Attitude Toward Inservice Scale, the CFK Ltd. School Climate Profile, the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire, and the Survey of Effective School Processes. Reasons why an assessment of a school's climate can provide valuable information for the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional inservice development programs are discussed. An example of an on-site staff development program at an elementary and secondary school in a large rural Pennsylvania school district (Keystone Central) is described: a local inservice leadership team was chosen, staff development needs and school climate assessed, immeditate and long-term goals set, and implementation begun. Tables provide results of the CFK School Climate Profile for Keystone Central. (MH)

IMPROVING THE CLIMATE IN RURAL SCHOOLS THROUGH AN INDIVIDUALIZED STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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A paper presented at the National ACA Convention, Manhattan, Kansas, October 1983.

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Introduction

The term "climate" has been used in an educational context to refer to a variety of attributes in the learning environment ranging from physical factors such as room arrangements to social, psychological or leadership factors such as trust, shared decision-making, or job satisfaction. It is the purpose of this paper to explore the definition of school climate, to describe four instruments used to assess various dimensions of school climate and to discuss the implications of a school climate profile for developing an individualized staff development program in a rural school setting. An example of an isolated rural school staff development program will be presented to illustrate the development and interpretation of the school climate profile.

School Climate

Visitors to schools frequently comment upon the "atmosphere of the building" when they share their observations and reactions with others. Some reflect on the physical characteristics of the school plant itself, such as cleanliness or space allocation. Others point out social or psychological factors, such as student-teacher relations or teachers' attitudes toward their job.

School climate, as defined in the professional literature (Lazotte, et al., 1980) includes the values, beliefs and attitudes of the school community members as reflected in the institutional patterns, processes, and behavioral practices utilized in

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the school across time. These have been shown to enhance or impede student achievement (Coleman et al., 1966; Squires, 1980). Thus a positive school climate is both a means and an end. This means school climate is a platform upon which productive learning and teacher job satisfaction is built.

The effective schools research (Squires, Huitt, & Segars, 1981) confirms the relationship between a positive climate and three school norms; an orderly school environment, an emphasis on academics, and expectations for students' success. School climate is also related positively to three leadership processes; modeling, consensus building and feedback to teachers and students.

Therefore, getting a reading on school climate will enhance your ability to influence the improvement of student achievement and teacher morale.

School Climate Assessment

There are a number of varied elements in the school environment which contribute to the overall school climate. Likewise there are a number of instruments available for the assessment of these different elements. Described below are four instruments which the authors have used in schools in rural settings as part of a needs assessment and project evaluation component of a staff development program organized collaboratively with the Keystone Central School District (KCSD/PSU, 1979).

Attitude Toward Inservice

The Attitude Toward Inservice Scale (Trueblood et al., 1981) was devised to measure teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward inservice education programs. It has been used with samples of rural inservice educators (N = 244) by Trueblood, et al. (1983). This scale is a thirty-two item, Likert-type instrument. Coefficient alpha for the scale is .93. A factor analysis yielded three major factors,

labeled as: (1) General Expectations: feelings and beliefs stemming from past experience with inservice education; (2) Potential for Change and Improvement: feelings and beliefs about what inservice education can or should do; and (3) Past Benefits: feelings and beliefs about how inservice education has benefitted the individual.

Assessment and planning for school climate improvement through inservice education activities should include an attitudinal component. Attitude has been defined as a mental readiness or a learned predisposition to respond in a consistentl, positive or negative manner toward a given psychological object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In staff development terms we might say that teachers and administrators come to inservice activities with a mental set, ranging from highly positive to highly negative, about the value of such activities. Attitudes are multi-faceted, with affective, cognitive and behavioral components (Zimbardo, Ebbesen, & Maslach, 1977). Therefore it would seem that teachers would have some: (1) emotional responses to inservice education; (2) factual knowledge about training procedures and resuts of their prior participation; and (3) consistent ways of behaving before, during and after inservice workshops.

Assessing teachers' attitudes toward their own professional growth through inservice education provides baseline data and formative evaluation as staff development programs are initiated and refined. If you choose to use the attitude scale mentioned previously, either the total scale score, or individual factor scores may be used to guide program design.

CFK Ltd. School Climate Profile

The CFK Ltd. School Climate Profile (Fox, et al., 1973) was designed to provide a general overall assessment of school climate. This written survey examines eight general climate factors such as trust and respect, as well as specific

aspects of three major school climate determinants, namely school program, interpersonal process, and material determinants. As designed, the instrument is flexible enough that only selected areas may be administered at any one time, or additional areas may be added as appropriate to the local setting. Respondents are asked to rate each statement as to "what is" and "what should be". The results of the school climate survey may be charted using a discrepancy profile format which indicates the gap between the perceived view of the real situation and the desired or ideal situation. From such a profile, an inservice planning committee could easily target content and/or process outcomes with direct implications for staff development activities. This instrument will be highlighted in the case study that follows.

Purdue Teacher Opinionaire

The Purdue Teacher Opinionaire (Bentley & Rempel, 1967) assesses teacher morale, an important dimension of school climate. The scale includes ten factors which comprise some of the major facets of teacher morale, such as satisfaction with teaching and curriculum issues. The results of this survey instrument yield a total "morale" scale, as well as individual factor scores. The various factors could be targeted individually as areas for improving teacher morale. This opinionaire has a test-retest reliability of .87.

Survey of Effective School Processes

The Survey of Effective School Processes (/I/D/E/A/, 1973) differs significantly from the other assessment approaches mentioned previously in that it is based on a series of interviews, classroom observations, and a parent survey. Survey ESP was developed by /I/D/E/A/, the educational affiliate of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, as a part of the continuous improvement cycle of Individually

Guided Education (IGE). Interviews are conducted with several role groups, including the principal/steering committee, teachers, central office personnel, and students. Parents are included via a written survey. Classroom observations round out the information gathering process.

The analysis of information is based on thirty-five outcomes which reflect recommended school practices as defined by /I/D/E/A/. These outcomes are grouped into five clusters, including: (1) decision-making processes, (2) school organization, (3) curriculum, student learning program, inservice, and goal setting, (4) student roles, responsibilities, and assessment, and, (5) principal/staff working relationships.

Feedback on Survey ESP is generally reported in terms of the degree to which each outcome is found or not found in practice in the school. The information may then be utilized by the school staff as deemed appropriate for the local setting.

Staff Development

In the 1960's and 1970's, federal mandates for education included emphasis on "improved personnel development systems" for school districts through such programs as Teacher Corps and Teacher Centers. A number of specific factors, as well as general megatrends, have come together at this time to increase the expectations placed upon school personnel. Mandates such as mainstreaming of handicapped learners and bilingual and multicultural education, as well as rapid technological growth which places microcomputers into the math and science classrooms, requires inservice educators to acquire new skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Demographic trends such as shifting population centers and an overall declining school enrollment have contributed to an aging, more stable teacher population. The natural renewal and flow of new information, techniques, and related attitudes, which normally has come from the rapid turnover and change in

school faculty composition, have been severely retarded by this trend toward an aging teacher population.

Although the need for staff development appears in all sectors of education, the rural school setting has some unique charcteristics which make it a strong candiddte for the establishment of professional development programs for inservice educators. The population stability of rural communities contributes to a very low turnover rate in the teaching staff. The tendency of local citizens to remain in their home community further enhances this stability, thus contributing to an inbred quality of thinking. These characteristics all tend to inhibit the sense of risk taking necessary to foster educational innovation and change in rural schools. Rural communities are not noted for openness to the contributions of perceived "outsiders." Consequently, any new teachers or administrators who enter a rural setting must serve a prolonged probationary period before their ideas are accepted or adapted. Given the constraints for professional growth produced by these characteristics and factors, a strong program for continuous self-renewal seems urgently necessary for the improvement of education in rural settings.

Traditional approaches to inservice education, characterized by "one-shot pep talks by outside experts" have failed to take into account the diversity and complexity of individual teachers' classrooms. While school improvement efforts have recently been aimed at the school as the unit of change, the actual site of any change is the individual classroom, and the primary object of change, as well as the agent of change, is the individual classroom teacher. In other words, schools don't improve, the individuals working in them do!

Staff development programs represent a formal attempt to help teachers grow and develop across the span of their professional careers. Fullan (1982) points out that the crux of change is how individuals come to grips with it. Thus how rural teachers view themselves, their school, and the changes implied in staff

development programs are all factors which interact and contribute in part to a school's overall climate.

Little research has been done on the needs of rural teachers (Edington, 1976; Parks & Sher, 1979; Sher, 1977; Sher & Rosenfeld, 1977). The Keystone Central School District/Penn State University Teacher Corps Project (1979) and the work by Lortie (1975) and Fullan (1982) provide some evidence to show that rural teachers tend to:

1) be highly individualistic and thus see their problem as being unique
2) prefer to work on staff development projects which they can work on alone
3) be wary of evaluation from "outsiders"
4) stay in one school district during their entire careers
5) prefer to get help from "trusted" fellow teachers
6) prefer psychic rewards, respect from peers and time to work on their perceived needs during staff development time
7) have a high sense of pride in their schools
8) see change as a personal rather than a group-based experience
9) use practical criteria to assess the changes they are asked to make
10) be isolated from institutions of higher education and thus do not pursue graduate study.

The assessment of a school's climate, as reflected in the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the teachers and administrators who work there, can provide valuable information for the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development programs. These programs, in turn, can provide opportunity to directly address the multiple factors which contribute to a positive climate.

In reviewing some of the emerging findings of the effective schools research, Justiz (1983) points out that:

> There are certain values, norms, roles, and relationships we can now identify that create the climate for highly professional teacher behavior and strong student performance.

> It is now clear that achieving excellence requires that people in individual school districts and schools be free to agree on what they want to accomplish, to orchestrate the necessary resources, to avoid the bureaucratic intervention and to have access to stimulating ideas and programs. (p. 12)

In summary, professional development programs, responsive to existing school climate factors, offer potention for the continuous self-renewal of rural schools.

School Climate Implications for An Individualized Staff Development Program--An Example in Practice

In 1979, the Keystone Central School District and Penn State University entered a collaborative Teacher Corps partnership to develop and deliver an on-site staff development program to the district's most isolated school setting. Geographically, Keystone Central is one of Pennsylvania's largest rural school districts, covering approximately 700 square miles. During the planning year, a basic thrust of the Teacher Corps project was the identification and training of a local inservice leadership team (ILT). The KCSD ILT was composed of key teachers, building administrators, and representatives of the district's central office staff (largely perceived as "outsiders" by the local teachers and administrators). This thrust was selected in order to provide for on-going school-based leadership after the formal project came to an end, and to assure the local teachers that they had control over content, delivery-option and reward-system decisions in the staff development program. From the initial planning session, the Penn State faculty worked to avoid the perception of "outsiders" with pre-set notions as to what was needed to "fix up" the schools.

The target site included an elementary school (K-6) and a secondary school (7-12). Although the buildings were less than one hundred yards apart, there was little or no communication between the teachers regarding students, curriculum or resources. At the request of the ILT, the staff development program was designed to include both faculties in joint planning and participation.

The first step in planning included conducting an assessment of staff development needs. The leadership team was given training in the administration and interpretation of a variety of needs assessment procedures and instruments. Data from several sources were analyzed, and specific inservice education outcomes were targeted for implementation over a two-year period. These professional development outcomes included not only content topics for workshops, but also recommended modes of delivery and required support system for classroom implementation of new products or processes.

One of the instruments included in the needs assessment was the CFK Ltd. School Climate Profile. As described earlier, this instrument provides a reading on key school climate determinants. The survey was administered by the ILT, and scored by computer. The results were then presented to the ILT in both graphic (see Figures 1-2) and tabular form (see Tables 1-4).

The major climate factors with their mean scores and differences are shown in Table 1. Each factor is comprised of several categories (Tables 2-4). For each category there are five items in statement form. Response choices and their related point value are: almost never (1), occasionally (2), frequently (3), and almost always (4). Thus the score range for each category is five to twenty.

Tables 2,3, and 4 show the mean response scores for the project schools. As the ILT examined these data, some areas were targeted for immediate attention, while other categories were built into long-range plans. The benefit of having central office personnel actively involved in the school-based leadership team became obvious during the discussions of perceived discrepancies between what is and what should be. As shown in Table 4, the greatest discrepancy for both schools was found in the process category of involvement in decision making. Table 5 shows the five items that make up this category. Item 3 is stated in almost direct opposition to the way in which inservice education had been planned for these

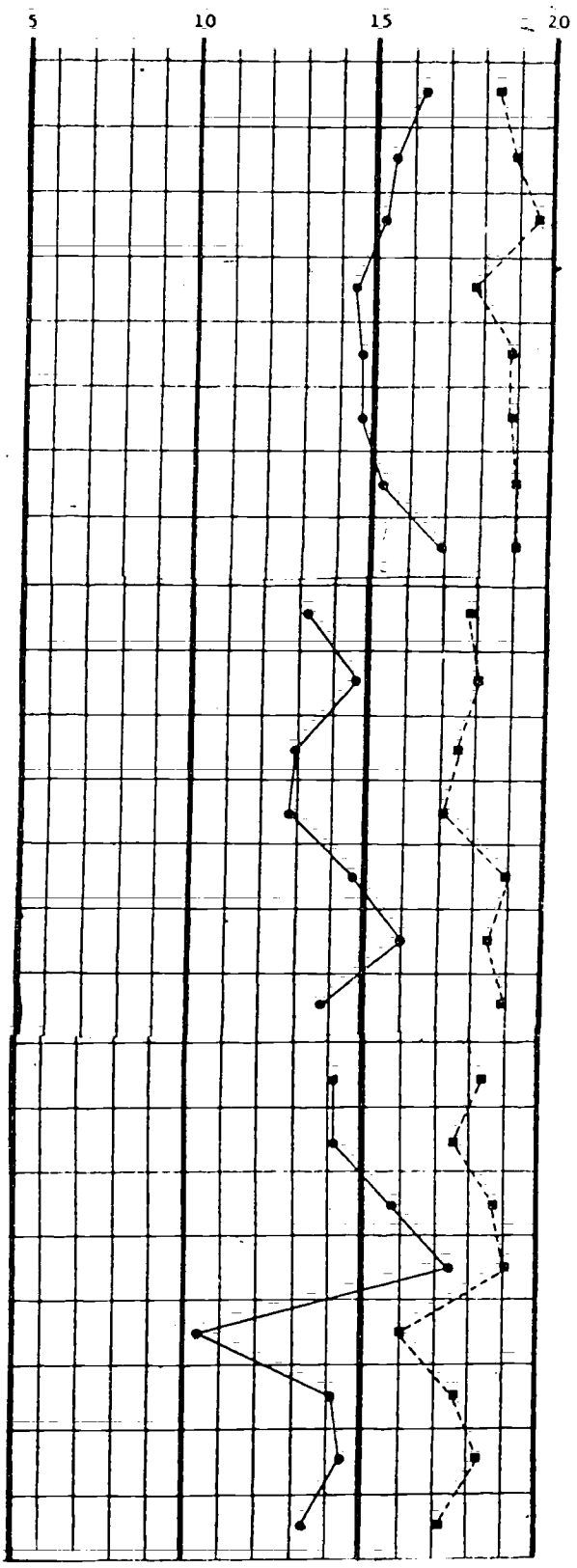
teachers in the past. Although this particular item encompasses a wider variety of decisions than inservice, it served to stimulate discussion as to the value and need to involve all teachers in the design of professional development activities that would have maximum impact on individual classroom. All of the other 130 items in the instrument were examined for their implications for inservice education in a similar manner.

As differences between the elementary school and the secondary school profiles were noted, it also became apparent that each school had its own unique climate. Thus an awareness grew that one district-wide approach to inservice education failed to take into account the local variations in attitudes, interests and needs. As the Teacher Corps project progressed into the implementation stage of the staff development program, elementary and secondary teachers joined together into small learning resource teams. After identifying their personal and team learning objectives, each team called upon teachers within their school, other district personnel, and university faculty to assist them with their learning activities. The needs assessment was repeated at the end of the second and third years of the project, and results were used to further refine the inservice education program for each school.

Summary

As the staff development program was expanded to other sites in the Keystone Central School District, attitude, morale, and school climate profiles were developed by each school's inservice leadership team. The involvement of the central office staff again served to open district-wide communication and sharing of expertise. Psychological as well as geographical distance between the central office and the isolated sites was bridged as mutual trust and respect was developed. The climate for professional development continues to grow more positive in this rural school district.

FIGURE 1
CFK School Climate Profile
Elementary School
N=23



GENERAL CLIMATE FACTORS

1. Respect
2. Trust
3. Union Morale
4. Opportunity for Input
5. Continuous Academic and Social Growth
6. Responsiveness
7. School Renewal
8. Caring

PROGRAM DETERMINANTS

1. Active Learning
2. Individualized Performance Expectations
3. Varied Learning Environments
4. Flexible Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities
5. Appropriate Support and Study
6. Rules Cooperatively Determined
7. Varied Reward System

PROCESS DETERMINANTS

1. Problem Solving Ability
2. Improvement of School Goals
3. Identifying and Working With Conflict
4. Effective Communications
5. Involvement in Decision Making
6. Autonomy with Accountability
7. Effective Teaching-Learning Strategies
8. Ability to Plan for the Future

WHAT IS . . . . . ●—●

WHAT SHOULD BE . . . ■—■

FIGURE 2
CFK School Climate Profile
High School
N=53

GENERAL CLIMATE FACTORS

1. Respect
2. Trust
3. High Morale
4. Opportunity for Input
5. Continuous Academic and Social Growth
6. Cohesiveness
7. School Renewal
8. Caring

PROGRAM DETERMINANTS

1. Acting Learning
2. Individualized Performance Expectations
3. Varied Learning Environments
4. Flexible Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities
5. Appropriate Support and Structure
6. Rules Cooperatively Determined
7. Varied Reward System

PROCESS DETERMINANTS

1. Problem Solving Ability
2. Improvement of School Goals
3. Identifying and Working With Conflict
4. Effective Communications
5. Involvement in Decision Making
6. Autonomy with Accountability
7. Effective Teaching-Learning Strategies
8. Ability to Plan for the Future

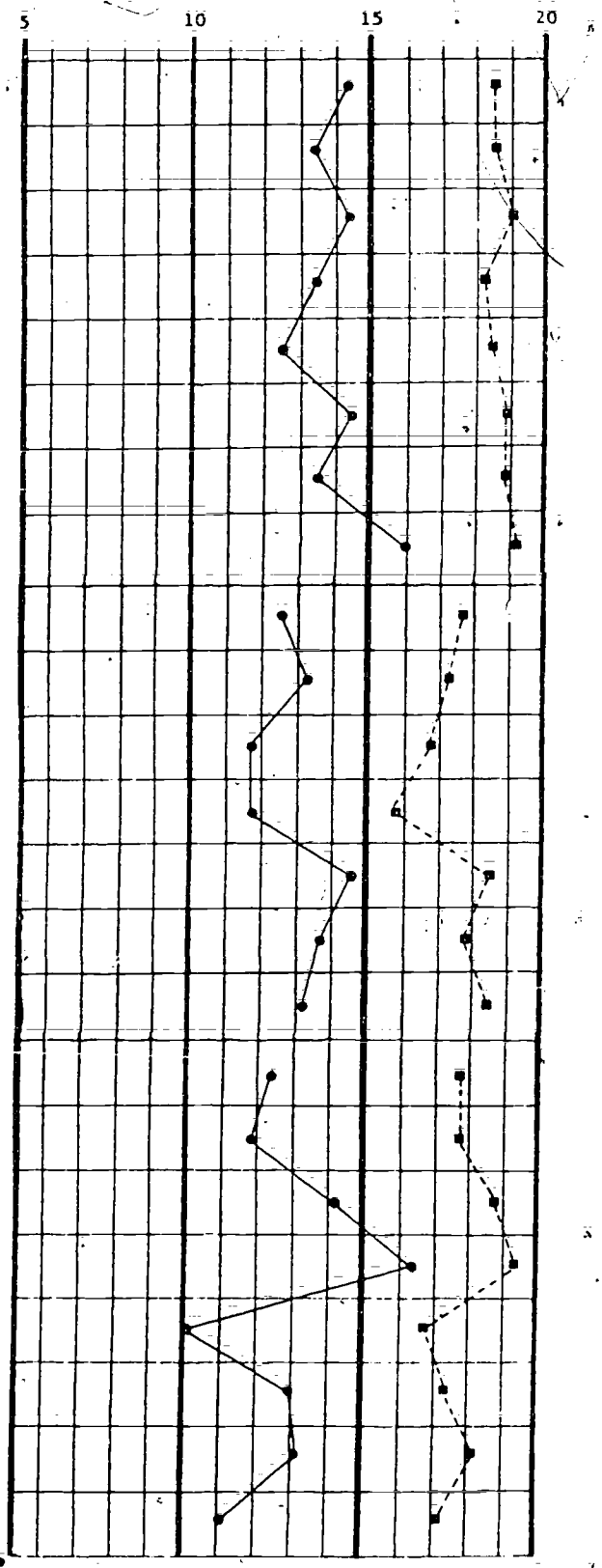


TABLE 1

CFK SCHOOL CLIMATE PROFILE
BY FACTORS

Mean Scores and Differences

Factor	High School N=53			Elementary School N=23		
	What Is	What Should Be	Difference	What Is	What Should Be	Difference
General Climate	113.5	150.2	36.7	123.8	150.6	2.8
Program Determinants	91.4	122.8	31.4	98.6	126.8	28.2
Process Determinants	103.0	143.4	40.4	114.5	143.3	28.8

TABLE 2

CFK SCHOOL CLIMATE PROFILE
GENERAL CLIMATE FACTORS
BY CATEGORY

Mean Scores and Differences

Category	High School N=53			Elementary School N=23		
	What Is	What Should Be	Difference	What Is	What Should Be	Difference
Respect	14.5	18.6	4.1	16.4	18.5	2.1
Trust	13.7	18.6	4.9	15.6	18.9	3.3
High Morale	14.8	19.1	4.3	15.3	19.6	4.3
Opportunity for Input	13.5	18.4	4.9	14.4	17.8	3.4
Continuous Academic and Social Growth	12.6	18.7	6.1	14.7	18.8	4.1
Cohesiveness	14.8	18.9	4.1	14.9	19.0	4.1
School Renewal	13.6	18.8	5.2	15.4	19.0	3.6
Caring	16.0	19.1	3.1	17.0	19.0	2.0

TABLE 3: CFK SCHOOL CLIMATE PROFILE
PROGRAM DETERMINANTS BY CATEGORY
Mean Scores and Differences

Category	High School N=53			Elementary School N=23		
	What Is	What Should Be	Difference	What Is	What Should Be	Difference
Active Learning	12.6	17.8	5.2	13.3	18.0	4.7
Individualized Performance Expectations	13.3	17.4	4.1	14.8	18.0	3.2
Varied Learning Environments	11.9	16.8	4.9	13.0	17.5	4.5
Flexible Curriculum and Extracurricular Activities	12.0	15.8	3.8	13.0	17.2	4.2
Support and Structure Appropriate to Learners Maturity	14.7	18.5	3.8	14.7	18.9	4.2
Rules Coperatively Determined	13.8	17.9	4.1	16.0	18.5	2.5
Varied Reward System	13.2	18.6	5.4	13.8	18.7	4.9

TABLE 4: CFK SCHOOL CLIMATE PROFILE
PROCESS DETERMINANTS BY CATEGORY
Mean Scores and Differences

Category	High School N=53			Elementary School N=23		
	What Is	What Should Be	Difference	What Is	What Should Be	Difference
Problem Solving Ability	12.4	17.8	5.4	14.3	18.4	4.1
Improvment of School Goals	12.0	17.9	5.9	14.2	17.6	3.4
Identifying and Working With Conflicts	14.2	18.8	4.6	15.8	18.8	3.0
Effective Communications	16.5	19.4	2.9	17.5	19.1	1.6
Involvment in Decision Making	10.2	16.7	6.5	10.4	16.0	5.6
Autonomy and Accountability	13.0	17.4	4.4	14.2	17.7	3.5
Effective Teaching-Learning Strategies	13.2	18.3	5.1	14.5	18.3	3.8
Ability to Plan for the Future	11.4	17.2	5.8	13.5	17.3	3.8

TABLE 5

CFK SCHOOL CLIMATE PROFILE
PROCESS DETERMINANTS
BY ITEM

Mean Scores and Differences

Categories and Item	High School (N=53)			Elementary School (N=23)		
	What is	What Should Be	Difference	What is	What Should Be	Difference
INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING:						
1. Teachers help in selection of new staff members.	1.85	3.34	1.49	1.70	3.09	1.39
2. Parents help to decide about new school programs.	1.81	3.09	1.28	1.91	2.87	0.96
3 Decisions that affect this school are made by the superintendent and the central staff only after opportunity has been provided for discussion and input from the school's principal, staff, and students.	2.23	3.60	1.37	2.26	3.65	1.39
4. I have influence on the decisions within the school which directly affect me.	2.53	3.60	1.07	2.78	3.61	0.83
5. The student government makes important decisions.	1.81	3.09	1.28	1.74	2.83	1.09

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