

The Effects of Teacher

Running Head: THE EFFECTS OF TEACHER MORALE ON TEACHER

The Effects of Teacher Morale on Teacher Turnover Rates

Maria Rafferty

Sam Houston State University

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Abstract

There are several reasons why teachers choose to change schools or leave teaching completely. Stress related to increased demands on time, low pay, student discipline problems, low morale levels, and lack of support from campus administration are issues that teachers must face. This study attempted to determine the effect, if any, that teacher morale had on teachers' decisions to change schools. The results of the study showed that there was no significant correlation between teacher morale levels and teachers' decisions to change schools. The results also showed that there was no significant relationship between teachers' feeling of satisfaction with their principals and the teachers' decisions to change schools. The study did find that there was a very significant relationship between teacher morale levels and teachers' satisfaction with their school principals.

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## Introduction

There are a number of factors that influence teacher turnover in schools. Increased duties and demands on time, low pay, and disruptive students have a significant impact on teachers' attitudes toward their jobs. In addition, lack of support from staff at all levels has an effect on teacher satisfaction. A correlation study determined whether factors such as teachers' morale levels and satisfaction with principals are contributing factors in a teacher's decision to change campuses.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Teacher turnover in schools is the result of many different possible issues. The purpose of this project was to determine: (1) if morale levels among teachers play a significant part in their decisions to change school campuses and (2) if teachers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with principals affects turnover rates.

### *Research Questions*

Some of the more obvious reasons why teachers choose to change schools or leave teaching completely are salary, student discipline, and administration's demands. Other issues that anyone in the workforce faces are job satisfaction and personal morale. This includes teachers as well.

Question 1: Is there a relationship between teacher morale levels and teacher turnover rates?

Question 2: Is there a relationship between level of satisfaction with principal and teacher turnover rates?

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### *Significance to the Field of Marriage and Family Therapy*

Counselors assist clients with career evaluation and decision-making processes. Understanding and being aware of the variety of issues that have an impact on a teacher's morale is an important part of helping the teacher assess his or her needs and goals on a career level and ultimately determine what options are available to help the individual succeed in achieving these goals.

It is important to work through career related issues. A person's unhappiness with their job affects their relationships with others, especially their relationships with family members. Briggs and Richardson (1992, *Morale in Education*, ¶ 1) state that morale is a concern in the industrial world where salaries, working conditions, employee input, and management-labor relationships are areas of concern due to their impact on productivity and attitude. They go on to quote Schulz and Schulz's statement that "unhappiness at work carries over into other aspects of life, can disrupt relationships with family and friends, and can influence physical and mental health."

### *Definition of Terms*

1. **Morale** – Morale is the extent to which a person's needs are met. It is also the extent to which the person feels satisfaction in his/her job.
2. **Turnover** – Turnover refers to the decision a teacher makes to leave his/her current school.
3. **Teaching Team** – A teaching team is a pair of teachers who share in the responsibility of teaching all subjects to a specific group of students.

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### *Limitations*

One limitation of the study was the distribution of the survey to the teachers. Each principal controlled whether or not the surveys would be distributed to the teachers at their schools. Approximately sixty percent of the surveys that were distributed to the teachers were returned. Another limitation was the decision of each teacher to complete and return the survey or to disregard it.

### *Delimitations*

A delimitation of this study was the number of schools requested to participate. The researcher requested permission from four campus principals for participation from their teaching staffs. Two declined to participate, one agreed and the fourth did not respond at all.

### *Summary*

Job satisfaction is an issue that everyone faces regardless of his or her chosen profession. Teachers are no exception. Low pay and student conduct problems in the classroom are just a couple of issues that teachers face. Low morale among teachers is another very important problem that must be addressed if the problem of teacher shortages is going to change and ultimately improve. In order to work toward a solution, the first step is to identify those factors that have the greatest impact on morale levels, both negative and positive.



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### Review of Literature

The primary sources of literature for this study were journal articles retrieved online from the Newton Gresham Library. A search of the World Wide Web yielded several other articles related to this topic.

#### *Factors That Contribute to Teacher Turnover*

Teacher turnover has been an ongoing concern for years. Ingersoll (2002, *Teacher Turnover*, ¶ 4) states:

Compared to most other occupations, teaching has a relatively high turnover rate. It is also an occupation that loses many of its newly trained members early in their careers. In fact, as many as thirty nine percent leave teaching altogether in the first five years due to job dissatisfaction or the desire to seek better jobs or other careers, making the overall amount of turnover accounted for by retirement relatively minor.

There are a number of reasons why teachers decide to change schools, teaching assignments, or in some cases, leave teaching completely. Some of the most prevalent reasons for this are low salaries, lack of support from campus administration, increased demands by administration, problems with student discipline, and lack of teacher input in decision-making processes.

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### *The Significance of Administrative Support*

An important part of any individual's job is a feeling of self-worth. Employees experience higher levels of morale when they perceive that their contributions are valued and appreciated. A higher level of dedication results when employees feel that they have an active voice in issues that directly impact them. According to Lumsden (1998, *Reinvigoration*, ¶ 3),

By treating teachers in ways that empower them, such as involving them in decisions about policies and practices and acknowledging their expertise, administrators can help sustain teacher morale. Principals can also strengthen teacher morale by actively standing behind teachers. Effective principals serve as guardians of teachers' instructional time, "assist teachers with student discipline matters, allow teachers to develop discipline codes, and support teachers' authority in enforcing policy" (Blase and Kirby, 1992)

### *Effects of Low Teacher Morale*

There are both internal and external reactions to low morale. Briggs and Richardson (1992, *Internal Reactions to Low Morale*, ¶ 2) stated as a result of a study done by them:

The internal characteristics were confusion, insecurity, frustration, lack of confidence, fear of supervision and an attitude of futility.

As a result of low morale, the educators would resist change, and the school would have a high rate of teacher absenteeism.

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According to Briggs and Richardson (1992, External Reactions to Low Morale, ¶1), low morale is associated with an individual's attitudes, self-esteem, and self-concept. They also state that these internal feelings may result in external reactions. In this study, Briggs and Richardson also address the possible external reactions to or effects of low morale. They state:

These reactions refer to relationships with other teachers and administrators. These external reactions could result from some internal feelings of educators, such as insecurity, frustrations, and lack of confidence. According to the subjects in this study, educators with low morale would be engaged in backbiting (the slandering of an absent party), open hostility, bickering, communicating resentments, forming cliques, and generally showing a lack of consideration for others. In addition, the educators recognized that a number of teachers would react to low morale by resigning their positions, thus causing high teacher turnover.

### *Teacher Retention*

Teacher shortages are not so much a result of lack of supply as they are a problem with retention. Recruiting more teachers is not the solution to filling the vacancies that schools are experiencing. Rather, addressing the issues that are underlying the teachers' decisions to leave and working toward solutions will be a more effective means of solving the problem. Obviously, this would not result in a zero turnover rate; however,

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it would greatly reduce the percentages of turnover and the end result would be more positive from a staffing standpoint as well as from a morale perspective. Despite the fact that replacing more experienced teachers with less experienced teachers would keep down salary costs; high turnover does not come without a price. As with any business, new employees must be trained and that is an expense that the employer must incur. Schools are no different (Ingersoll, 2002).

Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995) state that high morale doesn't always contribute to high productivity. It doesn't always follow that happy teachers are necessarily the most productive. They go on to say that high morale includes low turnover, less absenteeism, and a better academic environment for instruction. According to them, principals are the ones who are primarily responsible for motivating teachers toward achieving their organizational goals.

### *Summary*

Acknowledging and supporting teachers begins at the campus level. Principals have the ability to improve teacher morale by listening to them and supporting them. Involving teachers in decision-making processes validates the teachers and as a result has a positive effect on morale levels with the teachers and among the entire staff.

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### Methodology

Through substitute teaching, the researcher came in contact with a variety of teachers and administrators. There were apparent differences in administrative styles among school principals as well as differences in teaching styles and attitudes among teachers.

#### *Participants*

The participants in this study were schoolteachers, primarily grades kindergarten through sixth. The researcher submitted written requests of the principals for distribution of the surveys. Included with each request letter was a copy of the letter to the participants, explaining the nature of the study, and a copy of the survey to be distributed. Once permission was granted to the principals, the surveys were to the respective staffs. Each participant received a letter of informed consent, a copy of the survey and a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the survey.

#### *Instrument*

Based on observations made through substitute teaching, the researcher designed a survey that specifically addressed areas related to teacher satisfaction and morale. Specific areas relating to personal and staff morale levels, satisfaction with teaching team and school principal were addressed. The survey was primarily multiple choice with a few short answer questions.

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### *Data Collection*

The researcher requested permission to have surveys distributed to several teachers. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, all surveys were completely anonymous and returned in self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided with the surveys. The dependent variables in this study were the responses to the survey. The independent variables were the length of teaching experience and the time each teacher has been at his/her current school.

### *Data Analysis*

The data was input into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Correlation tests were run for the principals' ratings and staff morale as well as principals' ratings and individual morale levels of teachers to determine whether or not there was a relationship between principals and teacher turnover rates. In addition, partial correlations were run using the following variables: ratings of principals, individual teachers' morale and teachers' decisions to change campuses. The partial correlation determined if there was a relationship between teachers' decisions to leave their schools and their morale levels.

### *Summary*

A survey was designed specifically to obtain teacher input. School principals were contacted and written permission was requested of them to allow distribution of the surveys. Contingent upon the principal's permission, the surveys were distributed to the teachers by the principal's office staff. In order to guarantee complete anonymity, no identifying information was requested. Each survey was returned via an attached self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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### Findings

This study was conducted in order to determine whether or not there was any relationship between teacher turnover rates in schools and levels of morale among teachers. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was run. An alpha level of  $+.05$  was necessary in order to be considered statistically significant. At an alpha level of  $.05$ , the likelihood that the data resulted from chance was only 5 chances out of 100.

#### *Findings*

##### Finding One

There was no statistically significant relationship between teacher morale levels and teacher turnover rates.

##### Finding Two

There was no statistically significant relationship between level of satisfaction with principals and teachers' decisions to change schools.

##### Finding Three

There was no statistically significant relationship between teachers' current morale levels and the possibility of them changing schools next year.

##### Finding Four

There was no statistically significant relationship between years of teaching experience and a teacher's morale level.

##### Finding Five

There was a statistically significant relationship between teachers' current morale levels and their level of satisfaction with their principals.

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### Finding Six

There was a statistically significant relationship between teachers' levels last year, their satisfaction with their principals and their decisions whether or not to change schools.

### Finding Seven

There was a statistically significant relationship between teachers' current morale level, their level of satisfaction with their principals and their possible decisions whether or not to change schools next year.

### Finding Eight

The responses showed that 28% of the teachers surveyed felt that TAAS/TAKS testing added more stress on them.

### Finding Nine

The responses showed that 36% of the teachers surveyed felt that principals were a contributing factor to low morale in their schools.

### *Summary*

The study determined that there was no relationship between teacher morale levels and teacher turnover rates. It also determined that there was no relationship between level of satisfaction with principals and teachers' decisions to change schools. The study did show that there was a significant relationship between teachers' current morale and their level of satisfaction with their principals.



Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold. One purpose of this study was to determine if there was any relationship between morale levels among teachers and their decisions to change school campuses. The second purpose of the study was to determine if there was a relationship between teacher turnover rates and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the principal.

*Discussion of Findings*

As illustrated in tables 1 and 2, the study found that there was no statistically significant relationship between teacher morale levels last year and their decisions whether or not to change schools. In addition, it found that there was no statistically significant relationship between teachers' satisfaction with their principals and teachers' decisions whether or not to change schools.

Table 1  
Correlation Results of Change and Morale Last Year

Variables	Change	MoraleLY
Change	1.000	-0.052
MoraleLY	-0.052	1.000

$r = -.052, p > .05$

Table 2  
Correlation Results of Change and Satisfaction with Principal

Variables	Change	Principal
Change	1.000	-0.134
Principal	-0.134	1.000

$r = -.134, p > .05$

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The correlation studies (see tables 3 and 4) did find that there was no statistically significant relationship between teachers' current morale levels and their decisions whether or not to change schools next year. The correlation coefficient is actually .051, just slightly higher than the .05 level of significance. In addition, the study concluded that there is no significant relationship between current morale level and years of teaching experience.

Table 3  
Correlation Results of Change for Next Year and Current Morale Level

Variables	NextYR	MoraleNOW
NextYR	1.000	-0.395
MoraleNOW	-0.395	1.000

$r = -.395, p > .05$

Table 4  
Correlation Results of Teaching Experience and Current Morale Level

Variables	TeachEXP	MoraleNOW
TeachEXP	1.000	0.101
MoraleNOW	0.101	1.000

$r = .101, p > .05$

Table 5 shows a strong relationship between current morale levels of teachers and their levels of satisfaction with their principals. It is statistically significant at the .01 level. A significance level of  $< .01$  means that there is little chance of error in the correlations.

Table 5  
Correlation Results of Satisfaction with Principal and Current Morale Level

Variables	Principal	MoraleNOW
Principal	1.000	-0.646**
MoraleNOW	-0.646**	1.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

$r = -.646, p < .01$

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Partial correlation studies were done using the following variables: 1) decision to change school, morale level last year and level of satisfaction with principal as well as 2) decision to change schools next year, level of satisfaction with principal and current morale level. In each set of variables, partial correlations were run controlling for each of the variables separately.

In the first grouping (see table 6), there was a statistically significant relationship when controlling for change. It was statistically significant at the .05 level. This means that there was a significant relationship between teachers' morale levels last year and their level of satisfaction with their principals.

Table 6  
Results of Partial Correlation of Satisfaction with Principal and Current Morale Level Controlling for.. Change

Variables	MoraleLY	Principal
MoraleLY	1.000	-0.477 *
Principal	-0.477 *	1.000

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

$r = -.477, p < .05$

Table 7 illustrates the results of the partial correlation run in the second group. When controlled for decision to change schools next year, there was a statistically significant relationship between teachers' current morale levels and their satisfaction levels with their principals. It was statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 7  
Results of Partial Correlation of Satisfaction with Principal and Current Morale Level Controlling for.. NextYR

Variables	Principal	MoraleNOW
Principal	1.000	-0.560 *
MoraleNOW	-0.560 *	1.000

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.  $r = -.560, p < .01$

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Comments from teachers on the surveys yielded additional findings. Twenty eight percent of the respondents indicated that TAAS/TAKS testing (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills/Texas Assessment of Knowledge Skills) increased their levels of stress. Thirty six percent of the respondents stated that their principals were a contributing factor to low morale. They stated that there was a lack of communication, lack of teacher support, poor rapport between the principal and the teachers and the teachers are not treated as professionals.

### *Summary*

The participants in this study were primarily grade school teachers. Surveys were distributed to the teachers after principal consent was secured. Participation was optional and those who chose to participate returned their surveys via self-addressed stamped envelopes that were attached to each survey. All responses were completely anonymous.

The study showed that there was no significant relationship between the morale levels of teachers and their decisions whether or not to change schools. It also showed that there was no significant relationship between teachers' decisions to change schools and whether or not they were satisfied with their principals. The study did show that principals did have an impact on morale levels of teachers.

### *Recommendations For Further Study*

The majority of the respondents to this survey came from one school. If this study were to be conducted again, I would recommend increasing the geographic area to include more than one school district. I would also recommend including schools at all grade levels, grade school through high school.

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### *Conclusion*

There is no statistically significant relationship between teacher morale levels and teacher turnover rates. Further, there is no statistically significant relationship between level of satisfaction with principals and teachers' decisions to change schools. The study did show that there is a statistically significant relationship between teachers' morale levels and their level of satisfaction with their principals.

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### Appendices