

## PRINCIPAL PRACTICES THAT BUILD AND SUSTAIN TRUST: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TEACHERS IN A HIGH-TRUST SCHOOL

*Understanding how principals build and support trust can inform school leaders' practice and efforts to retain teachers in the profession. The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions of principals' trust-building actions and dispositions. A qualitative case study was designed to understand trust as a multifaceted social phenomenon. Identified from a larger sample in a statewide study, the site was selected based on three criteria: high trust in the principal as evidenced by the Omnibus Trust Scale, the number of years the principal has been the school leader, and faculty stability over a five year period. Evidence was provided through semi-structured interviews with 14 teachers and a focus group research activity with 26 faculty. Thematic coding and data analysis was guided by the Five Facets of Trust, Social Capital Theory and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Influences. Teacher participants created five recommendations for principal actions that build and sustain trust. Findings suggest principals can create and support a high trust environment through specific actions which demonstrate benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability, and competence.*

Keywords: trust, principal leadership, self-efficacy, social capital, teacher retention

As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Change is the only constant in life." This reality is evidenced as principals and teachers strive to incorporate reform initiatives into an overflowing list of professional responsibilities. New curriculum standards, accountability mandates, technology, instructional materials, and attending to children's social and emotional well-being are just a few initiatives leaders balance as they strive to recruit and retain teachers (Fullan, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a, 2015b). Central to success is a principal who fosters relationships and creates a positive climate through specific leadership actions and interpersonal behaviors that build and sustain trust (Boies & Fiset, 2019).

Defining and understanding the construct of trust has been an educational research focus for over 30 years (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Goddard et al. (2009) found high-trust schools also demonstrated high levels of achievement and suggested additional research focused on ways to increase the level of trust in schools as a lever for closing achieve-

ment gaps. Scholars have also found that in schools characterized by high trust, principals and teachers work together to set goals, monitor progress, and meet students' needs (Forsyth et al., 2011). Additionally, teachers in high-trust schools express professional satisfaction, feel more efficacious, and share social capital (Demir, 2015). Importantly, a high-trust environment reduces stress and increases professional satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012).

While previous studies help us to understand the connections between trust, positive student outcomes, and teacher satisfaction, identification of specific actions and behaviors principals can use to create and sustain a high-trust environment is needed. The unique insight of teachers with high trust in the school principal may contribute to this knowledge. Teacher perceptions about trust-building behaviors can provide critical-guidance for leaders and researchers seeking to understand how trust is-manifested in educational organizations.

## **Overview of Literature and Theoretical Frameworks**

A literature review related to trust and leadership was conducted to understand what is known about trust in the school context. Social Capital and Self-Efficacy theories were used as frameworks to further understand the relationship between trust and its possible impact on factors that may contribute to teacher satisfaction and retention.

### **Trust: A Multifaceted Construct**

In early studies of trust as a reform resource, Bryk and Schneider (2002) identified themes of respect (e.g., interdependence, personal regard, integrity, and competence) as essential to the concept of relational trust. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) defined trust as “an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (Hoy, n.d.). They further defined and posited these trust facets could act as behavioral antecedents that cultivate and foster faculty trust in the principal (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

### **Trust and the Principal as Leader**

Studies of trust and leadership support the importance of the principal in establishing a culture of trust through demonstration of respect, integrity, competence, benevolence, and reliability (Cranston, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). To improve student outcomes, the principal must manage competing time and attention demands while also developing and implementing a vision, creating structures that support cooperation, using data to make decisions, and ensuring all stakeholders feel valued (Louis &

Murphy, 2017). This can be overwhelming for the most skilled leader. As Tschannen-Moran and Garies (2015b) articulate:

Although most educators acknowledge the importance of trust in their work, these qualities too often get squeezed out with the pressures of accountability. Such pressures can drive school leaders to impatience and anxiety, resulting in a climate of tension and fear that interferes with the learning of both children and adults. (p. 257)

While some leaders may view building trust as an additional duty, in fact it can be a leverage point that supports the social capital networks and teacher efficacy needed to effectively meet ever-changing educational challenges (Liou & Daly, 2014).

### **Trust and Social Networks**

Effective leaders work through collaborative social networks to build trust (Adams, 2008; Forsyth et al., 2006; Forsyth et al., 2011; Goddard, 2003; Van Maele, 2014). In collaborative networks, relationships increase “individual morale, self-esteem and selfworth, and are central to dealing with uncertainty, unpredictability and risk” (Kutsyuruba et al., 2011, p. 83). Trust is both a lubricant (Adams & Forsyth, 2009) and glue (Cranston, 2011; Fullan, 2010) for the work principals must do to manage and lead a school. By creating systems that support teachers’ work, leaders can reduce teacher isolation and increase the level of trust needed to work as a team.

Acknowledging that “trust is increasingly recognized as an essential element in vibrant, well-performing schools” (Tschannen-Moran & Garies, 2015b, p. 257) and that “trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team” (Lencioni, 2002, p. 195) an understanding of the nature of social capital can contribute to a principal’s capacity to nurture a trusting-school climate.

### **Social Capital Theory**

Putnam (1993) described social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society” (p. 167). Social Capital theory provides three lenses through which power and influence can be perceived. Bridging social capital provides members external access to diverse perspectives and resources. Bonding social capital builds on members’ shared characteristics and knowledge. Linking social capital requires authentic relationships and high levels of trust among network members because one or more member may have positional power over others (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 1998). In the educational context, bridging, bonding, and linking social capital may be built through shared experiences and resources within and across

grade or subject area teams.

## **Trust and Self-Efficacy**

Teacher efficacy is described as a teacher's "judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p.783). Bandura (1994) posited that self-efficacy is influenced in four ways: mastery experiences (success), vicarious experiences by models (seeing others succeed), social persuasion (affirmations and feedback), and reducing stress (feeling safe being vulnerable).

Effective leaders recognize that positive relationships and self-efficacy are essential to achieving an organization's goals (Demir, 2015). Through facilitation of professional relationships, principals may create an environment in which teachers feel safe innovating in their practice, learning from one another, and sharing rather than competing for resources. Devoting time and energy to creating environments that support collaboration and nurture trust increases efficacy and teacher fulfillment (Collie et al., 2012; Demir, 2015; Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannouz, 2016; Fullan, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

## **Creating a Climate of Trust**

Effective principals recognize the impact trust can have on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012; Demir, 2015; Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannouz; 2016). Building social networks to achieve the goal of educating all children at high levels requires a principal teachers trust. Understanding how to create a trusting environment may inform educational leaders' work. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand teachers' perceptions in a school with high trust in the principal and to identify strategies leaders can utilize to build trust and to support teachers, retaining them in the profession.

## **Research Design**

Because trust is a multifaceted social phenomenon, a case study was chosen to understand how trust is developed (Yin, 2014). The research site was derived from quantitative research conducted in 2014 to measure the level of trust in 95 California schools (Bukko, 2014). To provide context, the two phases involved in site selection for this study are described.

### **Phase One: Identifying High-Trust Schools**

In the quantitative study, the Omnibus Trust Scale (Hoy, n.d.) was

used to measure the level of teacher trust in the principal, colleagues, and clients (Goddard et al., 2001; Hoy, 2002; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). The target population included K-12 public schools at which the principal was the leader for at least two school years. The level of teacher trust in the principal at these schools ranged from a minimum of 208 (lower than 99% of schools in the normative sample) and a maximum of 701 (higher than 97% of schools in the normative sample) (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). In the original study, 14 of the 95 schools met this high-trust criteria, all of which were at the K-8 grade levels. Schools with a trust in principal score of 600 or higher (higher than 84% of other schools) were considered high-trust in phase 2.

## **Phase 2: Qualitative Case Study**

As the purpose of the case study research was to gain a deeper understanding of how trust in the principal is developed and supported, it was necessary to first investigate the current context at the 14 high-trust schools identified in the quantitative study. To limit possible variables that might influence the level of trust in a school, inclusion criteria for the case study were: (1) the principal continued in the leadership role between 2014-2018; (2) staffing remained stable with at least 80% of teachers at the same school between 2014-2018; (3) access to the site was granted; and (4) at least 80% of teachers gave informed consent. Six of the fourteen schools met the four inclusion criteria.

With support from district-level administrators, informed consent was obtained, and teachers at each of the six schools completed the Omnibus Trust Scale. Results indicated that two of the six schools maintained a high level of trust (600 or higher) in the principal. Permission to conduct a qualitative case study at one of the two sites was granted. The second site was excluded by the superintendent because the principal was being moved to a district office position mid-year, creating a transition with which teachers were struggling.

## **Research Site**

Golden Valley Elementary School is a K-6 California school. 83% of students qualify for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and 40% are English learners. Purposive sampling was used as it provided for information-rich data from the teachers knowledgeable of factors within the organizational culture that may contribute to the level of trust in the principal (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the 2013-2014 school year, there were 23 teachers on staff, and 17 had worked at that school for their entire careers. In 2018-2019, there were 28 teachers at Golden Valley Elementary. Twenty of the 23 teachers who participated in the 2014 quantitative study remained on staff. To learn from the perspectives of teachers who

had joined the school staff subsequent to the 2014 study, these five staff members were also invited to participate in the focus group phase of data collection. The principal had been the school leader since 2010.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected in two stages. In the first, interviews were used to gather individual teacher perceptions. Data were then analyzed and initial findings were developed. In the second stage, initial results were presented to teachers in a focus group. This allowed for member checking and further theme exploration. Focus group participants then generated lists of actions they believe a school leader can take to build and sustain a trusting climate. Throughout data collection and analysis, researchers engaged in reflexivity, collaborative and independent coding, and peer review to look for data that may support alternate findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 teachers; as all teachers had volunteered to participate, two teachers were chosen at random from each of the grade levels. Recognizing the positional power of the principal and the potential for participants to be hesitant to speak directly about leadership and trust, indirect questions were used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Open questions such as “Describe any reasons you believe teachers might enjoy working at this school” and “If I were a teacher, to whom might I go for support” were used to explore possible reasons for the high level of trust. Participants were also asked questions which generated description of challenges and points of celebration related to their work as teachers.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and open coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All of the emergent codes were then analyzed to confirm or refute possible relationships with the five facets of trust (e.g. benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence). There was no evidence found that refuted one or more of the facets, nor were new potential facets identified. Therefore, these facets were used as a frame during the focus group.

In the second stage, a focus group was conducted to present preliminary findings, engage in member checking, and to complete the second stage of data collection with 26 of the 28 teachers participating. The focus group provided the opportunity for further exploration of themes that emerged from analysis of data and also served as a resource to refute or corroborate initial findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To maximize teacher voice and to generate additional data, focus group participants engaged in a research activity. Working in pairs, participants generated lists of actions they believe leaders may take to contribute to a trusting school climate. The group then re-assembled to discuss actions they had identified and to share additional experiences that had emerged as a result of their partner and full group discussions. Partici-

pants then categorized the actions they had identified into recommendations leaders might use to build and sustain trust.

Observation notes and artifacts generated during the focus group were analyzed for latent and manifest meaning using document and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). Codes and themes from the interview and focus group transcript analysis were used and the documents were also studied for emerging themes. This additional data analysis served as triangulation, providing for corroboration of evidence and to reduce the impact of potential bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Limitations**

Case study research provides the opportunity to explore and learn from a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). As a high-trust school in which the principal and staff have remained constant over a period of time, the level of collaboration and trust evident in this school may be attributed to more than the specific actions and behaviors of this individual principal. Although open-ended questions were used during data collection, other contextual or contributing factors may not have emerged. A limitation of this study is the focus on the principal's trust-building actions from teachers' perspectives. It should be noted, however, that this research provides a model for other schools seeking to replicate it for self-study within their specific context.

### **Findings**

Results suggest the pressure to implement educational initiatives made teachers' work more challenging. Evidence indicates these challenges were countered by specific principal actions supporting teacher development of social capital and self-efficacy. Findings related to themes of challenges and celebrations are explained. Teacher recommendations for specific actions principals may take to build and sustain trust are presented within the five facets of trust identified by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003).

### **Challenges**

Three intertwined reform initiatives were identified as the most significant challenges impacting teacher work: Accountability, Technology, and Social and Emotional Learning.

#### ***Accountability***

New state content standards and state testing systems were identified as having the most significant impact on teachers' daily work. One

participant shared, “The change is overwhelming in the last few years. First we had to learn new standards, but we still had the old instructional materials. Then new tests. Now technology. It’s been so fast!”

### ***Technology***

Teachers cited online state testing and preparing students for the future as two reasons for a technology emphasis. One participant articulated the challenge technology poses: “I have never been very tech savvy, so computers really made me think about whether I want to keep teaching. If it had not been for my team, I would have retired.”

### ***Social and Emotional Learning***

Being student-centered and focused on the whole child emerged across all interviews. One teacher reflected this commonality when she said, “the kids work hard but they are distracted and that makes it challenging to teach. If I don’t make it a priority to reduce their stress, we can’t get to the learning.”

It was clear teachers at Golden Valley are student-centered with high learning expectations. They are also aware their profession requires teaching content in humanistic ways that may create emotional labor: “I’m tired at the end of the day. The principal pushed me to think about the good I do for kids. He helped me see if I take care of myself, I can help them.”

### ***Celebrations***

Two celebration themes emerged: student growth and adults taking on new challenges. Teachers spoke of students who demonstrated academic and social-emotional growth, highlighting student persistence: “Students enjoy setting and demolishing their own goals”. Adult-based celebrations reflected admiration for peers who had taken on a challenge. Some had assumed leadership roles for special campus projects. Others volunteered to change a grade level so a peer with health issues did not have to change. Their commitment to one another was also seen in their celebration of those pursuing education: “One of my team members just finished her master’s degree. We are so proud of her!”

### ***Facets of Trust***

Trust-specific results are presented and include the Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) trust facet definitions. Evidence of teacher perceptions of trust-building behaviors were clustered into five teacher-created recommendations, and specific principal actions and the impact of those actions on teachers are provided.



## ***Benevolence***

Benevolence creates confidence that the interests and well-being of an individual are protected. This provides assurance the person they are trusting is someone with whom they feel safe being vulnerable and without fear of being taken advantage (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

**Teacher Recommendation.** To show benevolence, the principal should demonstrate the belief that teachers want to do well.

**Principal Actions.** Participants explained that relationships and a caring nature are essential to being an effective leader. “Know us as people and trust us as professionals” resonated throughout the data, and a focus on professional, friendly relationships was emphasized. Several participants explained the importance of a principal knowing staff as individuals: “I need a principal who will show interest in how I am doing.” Showing compassion for others and assuming teachers are doing their best was another common finding. Teachers expressed appreciation for compassion, and yet they know they are still expected to perform: “Even though he cares, I know he expects my best for the students. He’s a professional.”

One principal action participants advised was to make evaluations meaningful: “At Golden Valley we can take risks because the principal tells teachers he does not expect a perfect lesson.” Another teacher shared that she feels comfortable taking risks: “After the principal observes me, I know I will be doing most of the talking. He wants to learn what I am thinking. He will be honest and will give me good suggestions.”

**Impact on Teachers.** The impact of professional relationships, compassion with accountability, and meaningful evaluations that encourage risks creates a climate in which teachers feel valued and capable: “We belong here. This is our school. We want to be trusted. It’s not that we know it all, but we are not little kids. We are professionals.” Building on this, teachers in the focus group also explained that they value the principal’s encouragement of shared learning: “He provides subs for us to observe and co-teach, to collaborate, and to learn from one another.”

Teachers shared they are encouraged to innovate in approaches which has helped them to differentiate and meet individual students’ needs:

After an observation, I told the principal I couldn’t figure out why the students were struggling. He said, “I wonder what the students would say they need. So, I asked them, and they said they listen when I talk but need more time to think. I broke the lesson into smaller pieces and gave them time to collaborate before I moved on. It worked so well!

Working with a principal who demonstrates benevolence through relationships, high performance expectations, and a commitment to growth creates an environment in which teachers feel safe taking risks.

## **Honesty**

Honesty is demonstrated when an individual acts with integrity and authenticity. He or she takes responsibility for actions and does not place blame or present facts in a distorted way even when it may be in their favor to do so (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

**Teacher Recommendation.** To demonstrate honesty, the principal should show integrity by acting in ways that reflect their words.

**Principal Actions.** Participants recommended that principals hold true to their commitments, clearly communicate their beliefs, and treat each individual respectfully. A theme which resonated was the principal's deep commitment to ensuring teachers succeed. While participants expressed their appreciation for his care and concern, they each made clear that "when it comes down to it, the students come first. Even if that makes adults uncomfortable." During the focus group one teacher laughed and shared: "He doesn't pull punches but is respectful. He says, 'I will tell you what I think and invite you to do the same.' I thought, 'I wonder if he really will.' Yup. He's authentic when he says, 'Let's chat.'"

Teachers associated these actions with both respect and integrity. They also shared their observation that the principal does not talk badly about another person. When prompted to expand, one participant shared, "You know, some will take you in confidence and talk about another person. Like to get you on their side. It actually makes me wonder what that person might be saying behind my back." Others explained that the principal treats everyone with respect regardless of their position. One shared, "Everyone is valued. He's very authentic in wanting people to be successful. It makes me want to be the best person I can be."

**Impact on Teachers.** Acting with integrity and respect and holding true to a commitment to student success resonated with teachers and influenced their decision to mirror this behavior with fellow teachers. "When new teachers join our team, we tell them right from the beginning that we respect each other here." Teachers explained, "Don't get me wrong, we are not always 'one happy family.' We disagree but we do it respectfully. We have norms and listen and then talk and try to see things from the other person's perspective." Mutual dependence and a desire to do their best even when challenged was a consistent theme when discussing honesty as a trust facet. Participants described their work as challenging but explained that they "grow and move forward" if they can "have tough conversations about things that matter". They attribute this climate to the principal's expectation for serving students and working together as professionals.

## **Openness**

Openness is communicated when an individual is transparent,

sharing information in ways that supports reciprocal trust. When acting with openness, there is no fear of a person acting with a motive other than one that has been clearly articulated (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

**Teacher Recommendation.** To show openness, a principal should show humility and how to be a learning leader.

**Principal Actions.** Participants expressed that acting with humility and being transparent with a willingness to learn helps teachers be vulnerable. Explaining they can always count on him to provide reasons and data behind initiatives, teachers shared they appreciate that the principal solicits their input and authentically listens to their ideas. One teacher stated, “He always has an ‘anything is possible’ attitude.” Another echoed her appreciation for the brainstorming sessions they have. “Our one rule is to consider anything, no matter how extreme or ‘out there’ it might be.” At these meetings, the principal “always listens more than talks. When he offers suggestions, they show he values our ideas and wants to share decision making.”

**Impact on Teachers.** The principal’s openness to learning from teachers and to new ideas creates a sense of shared responsibility in achieving school goals: “He tells us we are leaders. We have to help each other because this work is too hard to do by ourselves.” Expanding on this, teachers explained that they often brainstorm in teams. “It’s nice to know we can count on each other and know that when we can’t fix something the administrators will be willing to bounce ideas with us.” Teachers cited this as an example of why they are committed to remaining in the profession.

## ***Reliability***

Reliability is communicated when an individual’s behaviors are consistent. Others have confidence that they know what to expect and that their needs will be met (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

**Teacher Recommendation.** To show reliability, the principal has to be consistent in actions and communication.

**Principal Actions.** Teachers believe principals who are fair, whose actions match their words, and who are predictable can be counted upon to support them. Valuing their principal because he “appreciates we have expertise and never wastes our time with unimportant emails or meetings” and “always makes sure we have what we need to do our jobs well,” participants emphasized the importance of being able to predict what the principal would say or do in different types of situations. “He is always respectful, and he always listens carefully. That never changes, whether it is a casual conversation or a heated meeting with an angry parent.” In addition to being consistent, the participants shared that the principal models what it means to differentiate to meet individuals’ and the group’s needs. They emphasized the importance of not “playing favorites” because that creates competition and makes it hard for them to trust

and collaborate with others: “We get what we need. Some people might need more than others. We don’t compete because we all know when we need something he will support us.” Additionally, teachers shared that the principal consistently encourages them to celebrate successes and to take care of their emotional health: “He is sincere when he says to take care of ourselves. It’s nice to know he expects us to work hard but that we should also recharge.”

**Impact on Teachers.** Feeling valued and reassured they do not have to waste energy anticipating what the principal wants or will do was cited as being impactful to teacher practice and sense of well-being. Participants were clear that improvement is an ongoing principal expectation: “We talk about innovation, but there is also this core of sameness. He is going to come with data and ask us to think about what we aren’t seeing. He’s always open to new ideas.” Teachers also emphasized that knowing what to expect reduces their stress.

### ***Competence***

Competence is communicated when an individual performs duties in ways that demonstrate knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge in ways that meet or exceed expectations (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

**Teacher Recommendation.** To demonstrate competence, the principal should understand instructional practices deeply and provide meaningful feedback.

**Principal Actions.** Participants distinguished between managing and leading when discussing competence-related actions. As a manager, the principal must be able to “get things done.” Emphasizing the importance of a leader who makes instruction and learning the priority, teachers also discussed instructional knowledge as essential to being a trusted leader. “To respect a principal, I need to know he understands how teaching and learning works. How can he help me be a better teacher if he doesn’t understand how students learn?”

During the focus group, teachers discussed the instructional knowledge effective principals must know to be good leaders. They expressed the belief that principals cannot really understand what it means to teach if they have not been a teacher themselves, but they also shared that they do not believe a principal must have taught at the same grade level as the school they lead. “Our principal is a great teacher. You can see that in our staff meetings and when he works with students in the classroom. He was a secondary teacher, but he still knows teaching.” The participants also shared that they valued their principal’s willingness to be vulnerable. “If he doesn’t know something, he’s the first to admit it. He asks for input and time to research. He says all the time, ‘Our students are learners and we are too.’”

**Impact on Teachers.** Teachers felt the school is managed well; this positively impacted their teaching because they had the resources and communication they needed. Significantly, the principal's competence in instructional leadership was evidenced in feedback: "He's always giving me great feedback tied to what happened for students. That helps me think about my teaching." Participants articulated that meaningful feedback helped them to feel more confident.

An additional impact resulting from the principal's leadership competence is increased teacher collaboration and trust. Teachers explained the principal is kind but also holds them accountable for how they work together as a team: "One time a teacher said something, and I was snarky. He said he understood I was tired, but that we always talk to each other as professionals." The balance of competence in the form of knowledge, being a learner, and holding one another accountable were cited as positive examples of the principal's leadership.

## **Discussion**

The level of trust teachers have in the principal is evident at Golden Valley Elementary. The principal's actions and dispositions reflect the five facets of trust which he uses within social networks to build teachers' self-efficacy.

Through benevolence the principal creates trust by balancing the need to push with the need to pull. He leverages competence in managing and leading the school and demonstrates honesty by ensuring his actions reflect the core belief that "students come first." Teachers feel safe taking risks and being vulnerable due, in part, to the principal's openness to new ideas and reliably providing structures and resources teachers need to overcome professional challenges (Kochanak, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

In this school, the principal supports social capital networks, creating teams that utilize bonding and bridging capital (Putnam, 2000). In addition, he links his social capital to theirs, working within teams while also aware of his positional power (Woolcock, 1998). As an instructional leader, he leverages his competence to build trust, encouraging teachers to think about their practice and to innovate. In addition, through engagement in meaningful professional learning, teachers share in the challenge of reflecting on their practice and making positive changes for the benefit of one another and their students (Kars & Inandi, 2017).

Through networks and shared resources, the principal creates a climate that lowers stress, provides affirmations, and supports ongoing success, all of which contribute to teachers' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). By creating a climate that strengthens the self-efficacy influences of mastery experiences, social models, social persuasions, and reduced stress, the principal builds and supports a climate of trust which contributes to teach-

ers believing they are capable of teaching all students effectively.

### **Implications**

Three implications emerged from the findings. First, findings may inform hiring practices. Providing hypothetical scenarios during interviews may make transparent how a candidate will respond in a situation requiring dispositions teachers associate with trust. Additionally, having the candidate watch a video of a lesson and then provide feedback during the interview may reveal the individual's level of instructional leadership competence. Teachers are more likely to trust a principal who can provide meaningful feedback that includes both affirmations and constructive suggestions.

Second, findings from the initial research showed that only 14 of 95 schools evidenced a high level of trust. This indicates there may be a need for increased attention to trust-building behaviors in leadership preparation programs and ongoing professional development. Administrator preparation programs and district leaders can develop and reinforce leaders' trust building behaviors through modeling and collaborative learning. By adding role play to trainings on policy-driven mandates (such as evaluations) and workshops on providing feedback, leaders can guide development of principals' self-efficacy in how to balance compassion with high expectations and accountability. Structuring workshops in this way will also communicate that social capital networks can be leveraged to support development of these traits.

Third, principals may benefit from creating a plan for building and supporting trust in their schools. Such a plan should include the opportunity to reflect on the school goals and how trust might be utilized to increase teacher collaboration and self-efficacy. Considering how they will purposefully manifest actions related to each of the facets of trust as well as facilitating bridging, bonding, and linking social capital and the four influences for building self-efficacy may do much to help a principal use trust to balance the many demands of school leadership.

### **Conclusion**

Findings affirm previous studies related to trust in the school context and indicate increasing the level of trust between teachers and the principal may contribute to teacher self-efficacy by buffering the challenges of teaching while also implementing multiple reforms. When teachers feel safe and know they can depend on the principal to be benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent, they are more likely to develop positive social networks and the self-efficacy required to teach effectively and to remain in the profession.

Additional research is needed to understand the perspectives of

principals at high-trust schools. Understanding how and why they create structures that influence school climate in relationship to trust may provide insight into how to best develop and support leaders. Further research might include replication of this study in high-trust school environments and the effects of high-trust environments on student achievement in longitudinal studies. Leveraging learning from the perspectives of teachers and leaders, researchers, and practitioners can collaborate in developing and evaluating the effectiveness of trust-related professional learning for educational leaders. Facilitating learning about trust and how it can be used is an important first step.

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**Debra Bukko is an associate professor at California State University, Stanislaus.**

**Kimy Liu is an associate professor at California State University, Stanislaus.**

**Anthony H. Johnson is an associate professor at California State University, Stanislaus.**