IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT SAMAD ISLAMIC SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

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IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AT SAMAD ISLAMIC SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

Hanan Matari and Ruqia Ali
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
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This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

**Works Cited**


11.19.16
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

LAYING THE FOUNDATION TO IMPROVE LITERACY IN A K-12 ISLAMIC SCHOOL THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: A FORMATIVE EVALUATION

IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT SAMAD ISLAMIC SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELLs) IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Hanan Matari and Ruqia Ali

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Approved:

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Chair, Dissertation Committee

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Director, EDU Doctoral Program

Dean, National College of Education

Date Approved

1-10-2019
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this leadership change plan was to understand the influence of Samad School’s culture on students’ academic achievement. The goal was to help Samad Islamic School to develop and follow an action plan to improve school culture. Wagner et al.’s (2006) 4C’s change leadership model was used to analyze four dimensions of the school: context, conditions, competencies, and culture. An adapted version of the School Culture Triage Survey was used to collect data. Survey results were presented to and discussed among teachers in both large and small group settings followed by written individual teacher reflections on the process. Based on these data, the school culture fell under the category of “needs adjustments and improvement.” Recommended strategies for improvement include: (a) revisiting the school vision and mission while involving all stakeholders, (b) building strong lines of communication through scheduling, (c) establishing an instructional leadership team to collaboratively work with administrators to design a professional development plan that meets the school’s unique needs, (d) developing teachers’ leadership and empowering them to take initiatives, (e) aligning curriculum horizontally and vertically, and (e) designing a professional development plan for administrators and teachers.
PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

Samad School is competing against veteran and young financially stable schools. We felt fortunate to be a part of the change plan that will be implemented to enhance the culture and effectiveness of the school. We observed the struggles and successes of Samad School striving to improve student achievement. Augmenting student achievement is almost impossible in a caustic culture. Being a part of the change plan provided us a balcony view of teachers’ frustrations and eagerness to change the environment for themselves and their students. We learned that it is important for school leaders to design a change plan and act on it. Some teachers are hesitant to change; consequently, engendering new adaptive behavior is the most challenging aspect of change plan implementation. However, we also realized that teachers accept change readily when it alters work conditions and self-expression in their favor.

It is important to present the change plan in a way that does not threaten the foundation of teachers’ values and traditions. It was clear that it is essential to indicate what will not change in the school so that the teachers are not overwhelmed with the notion of a change plan. This kind of situation demands a competent leader with great communications skills. We realized that one’s ability to present the forthcoming changes in the school is the key to attracting and gaining teachers’ support. It is absolutely crucial to give autonomy and voice to teachers if their contributions toward the school’s operations and student learning are to positively enhance the school culture.

We learned that teacher participation and collective decision making increase their commitment to the change. Additionally, as teachers’ feelings of self-worth and job satisfaction increase, the teacher attrition rate decreases. Work satisfaction is imperative
for teachers, and it is reflected in their performance. Student performance can only be enhanced when teacher performance is effective.
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

School culture is invisible, but it permeates every aspect of school operation. It impacts school leadership, staff morale, quality of instruction, and students’ attitudes toward education. In *School Culture Rewired*, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explained school culture: “Culture represents the unwritten mission of the school—it tells students and staff why they are there” (p. 30). Upon entry into Samad School (pseudonym), we felt a sense of chaos and a discord between the stakeholders. It took little time to analyze the school culture and how it is impacting the milieu and lowering the morale of the faculty and students. Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, and Byrd (2016) claimed that high-achieving schools demonstrate a culture that nurtures teachers’ collaboration, empowerment, and engagement. Ohlson et al. emphasized that student achievement can be increased by creating a culture that endorses a shared commitment to student success, the collective decision-making process, continuous professional growth, and a firm belief that all students can achieve success (p. 116). Additionally, Lange, Range, and Welsh (2012) confirmed that involving teachers in collective decision making empowers teachers to collaborate, grow professionally, and build accountability toward students’ learning (p. 5).

School leadership is the core for building and sustaining positive school culture. MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) suggested that principals who desire to increase students’ achievement must work on enhancing school culture (p. 77). This idea is also supported by Schlechty (2001), who stressed that it is imperative to change school culture in order to make any changes (p. 135). However, the problem at Samad School is that
improving school culture is not a priority because it is invisible and intangible. What we emphasized at Samad School is that the air we breathe is invisible and intangible but is essential for human existence; similarly, school culture is vital for the proper functionality of the school and student learning. Reeves (2009) explained that “although cultural change is challenging and time-consuming, it is not only possible but necessary” (p. 36). Thus, our mission became to design a change plan that enhances school culture and penetrates every aspect of healthy school operation, resulting in greater student learning. MacNeil et al. (2009) asserted that in a healthy school culture, students’ standardized scores rise and students excel in all areas of academics (p. 73).

**Rationale**

The culture of the school is the essence of school stability. The rationale for this change plan is to bring a sense of belonging, collegiality, community, and pride to Samad School. Samad School is facing high teacher turnover due to employment insecurity and low pay. Schlechty (2001) highlighted that this kind of insecurity contributes to a toxic school culture (p. 148). At Samad School, many teachers have expressed the need for continuous support from administrators to improve instruction and classroom management. Teachers feel that their voices are not being heard. Collaborative efforts are not being made; teachers are committed but lost. Ingersoll (2001) studied teacher turnover and shortage and reasoned that teachers leave their profession due to the lack of administrative support (p. 522). This kind of support is an important aspect of a sustainable and healthy school culture.

Confidence in school administrators and trust within the school community declined daily at Samad School. Lack of trust among the school’s faculty becomes
contagious and spreads to the community at large. Student enrollment fluctuates and attendance declines. With this kind of culture, where overall unity in the community and school is absent, students fail to flourish. When students struggle and do not reach their potential, this indicates the school is not delivering the quality education desired by stakeholders. When the standardized math and English test scores of Samad’s students are examined, it seems that only low achievers are enrolled at Samad School. However, the reality is that students are extremely intelligent, capable of learning, and achieving more than what is delivered to them. Samad’s success crucially depends on developing a healthy and positive school culture that enhances student achievement.

As experienced educators in the United States who originally emigrated from the Middle East, we felt an urgency to support Samad School. We have learned from our experience to pay attention to students’ needs, collect relevant data, and understand the students’ cultures before making any educational or behavioral plans for the students. For instance, the inability to bring back completed homework is not an indication of the students’ lackluster performance; perhaps, they are unable to receive homework help at home. At times, students’ impoverished lifestyles, their circumstances, and language barriers are the culprits. We also wondered why students were not wearing the proper school uniform or bringing the required materials.

**Goal of the Plan**

The goal of this change plan is to promote a positive school culture so as to improve students’ achievement at Samad School. Affirmative school culture is imperative to students’ achievement and teachers’ commitment to student learning (Fullan, 2012).
Additionally, school culture promotes collaboration, trusting collegial relationships, and community building. Our observation is that when schools are operated effectively, a sense of unity is cultivated that stimulates a shared responsibility among the stakeholders. Samad requires direction to build a great school, and we believe that this change plan, if executed, will do just that.

**Demographics**

Samad School is a private Islamic school that serves students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The school was established a decade ago, with the vision of empowering Muslim children to be effective citizens by learning to recite and memorize Quran while learning standard academics.

The school day consists of six instructional hours. To accomplish its mission, the school devotes two hours to teaching Quran, Islamic Studies, and Arabic. The numbers of students fluctuate from year to year, per educators in the school. The student population is approximately 110 students who are taught by 17 teachers. The highest enrollment rates are in the primary grades, especially in kindergarten. Almost all students are non-native, and they all come from different parts of the world, such as Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Somalia.
SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4 C’s

We adapted Wagner et al.’s (2006) *Change Leadership* model to assess the 4Cs of Samad School’s culture: context, competencies, culture, and conditions. This model provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding the problem, the different factors that contributed to it, the practices, the beliefs, the knowledge and skills of the people working in the school, and the data needed to create the change plan.

**Context**

Wagner et al. (2006) referred to context as the “skill demands” of all stakeholders that contribute to students’ success as well as the “larger organizational systems within which we work, and their demands and expectations, formal and informal” (p. 104). Samad School is located in an urban school district in Illinois. The school building is shared with another entity. Samad School was established in 2007, and its efforts are aimed at empowering Muslim students to pursue and excel in any field of their choice while maintaining their Islamic identity. At Samad School, 98% of its students are English Language Learners, and they are either foreign born or naturalized citizens. Their various cultural backgrounds create a dynamic school environment. The students come from economically diverse families as well. The staff members at Samad School consist of one administrator, one administrative assistant, 17 teachers, two teacher aides, and one facility engineer.

Even though diversity is considered to be a strength of the school, many staff members lack cultural competencies. At times, teachers and administrators do not understand the cultures of their diverse students; consequently, this leads to ineffective instruction. Some students and their families immigrated to America as refugees from a
tyrannical regime or a war-infested homeland. Many of the students have experienced mass destruction; their traumatizing experiences are also rooted in missing parent(s), sibling(s), or relatives in war. To make matters worse, the staff at Samad School is not trained to accommodate students with emotional needs. For most students, English is their second language; not knowing the language also hinders the learning process. Some teachers blame language barriers for low standardized test scores, whereas others blame the inherent backward culture of the student. We trust that the culture of the school has more impact on student learning than any of the other aforementioned elements.

Unlike most affluent families, students who came from adverse socio-economic conditions seemed unprepared, were late to school, and submitted incomplete homework. When we were exposed to the students’ families, we realized that some parents did not even have a reliable car that they could use to transport their children to and from school. The school does not provide a bus service, and students have to commute from various neighborhoods to attend Samad School.

The school has been operating for years without accreditation. The school is still in the process of gaining state recognition. Additionally, the high staff turnover rate did not help in improving the culture or morale of the school. Some teachers leave the school due to low pay and poor working conditions. This non-accredited school is a hub for inexperienced teachers; they join the school team, gain the desired experience, and then leave. For example, in 2016, all of the teachers were let go, with the exception of three language teachers. Teachers who had worked to build relationships with the students disappeared, and the academic year began with a new set of teachers who were unknown to the returning students.
Conditions

Wagner et al. (2006) defined conditions as “the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (p. 101). The school building itself consists of six classrooms that are divided into small classrooms using dividers. The dividers do not reach the ceiling, so noise can be heard across rooms. Many classrooms are split grades due to low enrollment. Most students are transported to school. The major concern teachers at Samad School expressed was the lack of collaboration time. In various ways, the teachers’ time is taken from them; therefore, they are providing a mediocre quality of education to their students. Teachers are requested to perform administrative duties due to a lack of funding to hire administrators. Time is also squeezed out of their planning periods to substitute and teach for their absent colleagues.

Teachers learn various instructional strategies during their professional development days, but they utilize them sporadically. Since they do not receive enough time or support to prepare and implement effective lesson plans, they resort to what they can do under these circumstances, thus ensuring an average performance. However, the school is trying to cultivate benchmarks to improve students’ performance starting the next fiscal year. At Samad School, plans are designed and printed on paper but are never executed. Teachers’ day-to-day activities are prioritized; thus, the long term and short-term goals are placed on the back burner. The priorities of the school are not well established. Various types of student data, such as Iowa Assessments test scores, are available but not considered in decision making. Even though the school curriculum is
aligned to the Common Core Standards, the students’ achievement in standardized assessment continues to be below expectations.

Even with the professional development opportunities the administrators provide, the teachers still lack the time to improve their pedagogical skills when they are asked to teach grade levels beyond their expertise. Teachers’ preparation time is not scheduled to maximize collaboration with one another. Even if the teachers are provided with opportunities to collaborate, they are sometimes asked to substitute for their colleagues due to lack of resources and funds.

The only administrator in the building is the principal who is supervising, observing, and sometimes substituting in classrooms. The principal at Samad School is often doing tasks outside of his/her job description. There is an administrative assistant, who in addition to his/her job duties, makes decisions on behalf of the principal if he/she is not available. The principal sometimes delegates administrative responsibilities to teachers in addition to their teaching duties.

**Competencies**

Wagner et al. (2006) defined competencies as “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that impacts student learning” (p. 99). Most teachers at Samad are certified and work diligently to maximize their productivity. Their passion for teaching is palpable even at the peak of their exhaustion. They desire to work hard to improve themselves, the students, and the school. They are aware of their students’ language limitations and skill deficiencies. Despite these honorable dispositions, a rigorous curriculum and high standards are not evident at the school. Teachers understand the amount of work that is involved in trying to elevate a school’s standards. They are aware
of insufficient time provided to collaborate in order to plan and improve student learning. Based on teachers’ reflection on their own professional learning, many teachers acknowledge their need to improve the essential skills required to build cooperative learning communities. The teachers also expressed their concern regarding the lack of administrator support and feedback on their own performance. Unfortunately, this lack of support and feedback discourages and hinders professional growth.

**Culture**

Culture is the indispensable fourth C of Wagner et al.’s change leadership model. Wagner et al. (2006) defined school culture as

the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students and learning, teacher and teaching, instructional leadership, and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school. Culture refers to the invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets held individually and collectively throughout the system. (p. 102)

However, at Samad School, the culture of old fashioned top-down leadership exists, and teachers desire a change so as to advance students’ learning according to 21st century demands. There is a disconnect between the expectations of the administrator and the teachers; teachers perceive this disconnect as fixable if the proper systems were in place.

A high premium is placed on quality education, even though the school is not delivering what is promised. All teachers are striving to improve the school but not as a united organization. There is a lack of communication and understanding among the teachers regarding the standards for student work. Teachers support students in various ways, especially in homework; however, cultural differences and language deficiencies
create difficulties in understanding and building relationships with their students. The greatest school strength is the zeal of the teachers to continue teaching under all circumstances.
SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this section, we discuss the study’s research design, data collecting techniques, and explain how and why we conducted our research. A mixed data collection method was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data to inform our change plan. The design consisted of two stages: (a) the collection of quantitative data through a survey and (b) the gathering of the qualitative data that is dependent on the results of the quantitative data instrument, the survey. This mixed method of data collection helped us to understand the quantitative results, and more details were provided by the qualitative data gathering process. In an open staff meeting, the results of the survey were shared and discussed so as to better comprehend the perspectives of the teachers and deepen our understanding of the survey results.

Research Design

In the first phase of the study, we conducted an adapted School Culture Triage Survey (see Appendix C). The survey tackled three aspects of school culture: professional collaboration, collegial relationship, and self-determination/efficacy. The staff completed a paper and pencil survey. To ensure honest responses, staff members were asked not to identify themselves because the survey was to be completed anonymously. The survey gave us accurate data on the conditions of the school and how these influence students’ progress. The results of the survey are presented in the tables and charts that follow.
Qualitative data collection was our second stage. The results of the survey were presented to the staff in an open meeting to collect in-depth data focused on how the leadership and faculty perceived the school culture.

**Participants**

Because individuals bring their own values, beliefs, and expertise to the workplace, we need to see how these individuals come together, take the same stand, and add to their values and beliefs. The participants in this study were the teachers. To eliminate bias, the principal was not present during survey completion.

Habegger (2008) worked with three successful principals who were running urban schools. Within their schools, there were high numbers of students coming from disadvantaged families. Habegger’s study suggested that regardless of the limited resources and socioeconomic backgrounds of the students, if a principal focuses on developing positive school culture, the students’ academic needs will be met. This stresses the importance principals play in building positive school culture (Habegger, 2008, pp. 42–46).

All Samad teachers were invited to participate in this study. In an open meeting, teachers were surveyed and were provided the opportunity to share and discuss how they perceive the culture of Samad School. Wagner et al. (2006) posited that having “ongoing discussion and problem solving” among staff and leadership frequently builds accountability (pp. 140-141).

**Data Collection Techniques**

**School Culture Triage Survey**

In spring 2017, the Samad School staff completed the adapted School Culture
Triage Survey designed by Wagner (2006) using paper and pencil. The survey provided us with information regarding staff experiences and perspectives on Samad School culture. The responses were tallied and recorded on a spreadsheet. Furthermore, the results of this survey were presented to staff in an open meeting for discussion in small groups and then shared with the whole group. Guiding questions (see Appendix D) were provided to spark the discussion. Discussion details are addressed in the data analysis section. The adapted School Culture Triage Survey consists of 16 questions that use the Likert scale with numerical values from 1 to 5. The survey assesses school culture in three areas: Professional Collaboration, Collegial Relationships, and Efficacy or Self-Determination.

Staff Responses From Survey

The results and findings of the School Culture Triage Survey were shared with Samad School faculty in an after-school staff meeting and they were given the opportunity to discuss and share their feelings openly with their colleagues through small group discussion and whole group sharing.

Data Analysis Techniques

To analyze our quantitative data gleaned from the School Culture Triage Survey results, we used the statistical descriptive technique because the survey employs a Likert scale. The survey was scored by adding the points for each question. The scores determined the level of attention needed to improve the school culture. Utilizing the triage survey score suggestions helped us and the school staff to determine the urgency of improving the school culture. Our analysis focused on the three aspects of school culture that are included in the adapted School Culture Triage Survey: Professional
Collaboration, Collegial Relationship, and Self-Determination/Efficacy. The questions were categorized under these three areas:

1. Professional Collaboration: Do teachers and staff meet and work together to solve professional issues, such as instructional, organizational, or curricular issues?

2. Collegial Relationships: Do people enjoy working together, support one another, and feel valued and included?

3. Efficacy or Self-Determination: Are people in this school here because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as true professionals, or do they simply see themselves as helpless, victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy?
SECTION FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section, we highlight the difference between culture and climate as two terms that are used contiguously in the field of education. We discuss the benefits of positive school culture as well as the different types of cultures that exist in schools today. Furthermore, we deliberate on the role of the principal as a change agent and as a role model in the school, and we highlighted the role of teachers in improving the school culture.

Culture and Climate

Houtte and Maele (2011) clarified that the term school climate was introduced in the 1960s and an aggressive effort to measure it began in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the term school culture became rooted in the research community. Houtte and Maele (2011) pointed out that many educators have been using the two words culture and climate interchangeably throughout the short history of the concepts (pp. 505–507). MacNeil, Prater and Busch (2009) commented that “culture is complex because it has very unique and idiosyncratic ways of working” (p. 74). Due to the ambiguity in the definitions of culture and climate, many people perceive culture and climate as overlapping concepts. MacNeil et al. (2009) held that values, norms, rituals, and climate are all a manifestation of culture (p. 75). Conversely, Houtte and Maele (2011) declared that “climate encompasses culture” (p. 507).

Climate

National School Climate Center (2017) defined school climate as, “the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents and
school personnel’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (“What Is School Climate?” para. 1). Walters (2015) simply stated that climate is ambiance for learning (p. 3). Loukas (2007) defined school climate as “some schools feel friendly, inviting, and supportive, others feel exclusionary, unwelcoming, and even unsafe. The feelings and attitudes that are elicited by a school’s environment are referred to as school climate” (p. 1). In layman’s terms, school climate is defined by the feelings an environment creates and the behavior displayed by the stakeholders.

**Culture**

Stolp (1994) defined school culture as values, beliefs, norms, ceremonies, rituals, and traditions that are formed during the existence of the institution (p. 2). Ross (2010) asserted that any social unit that shares history will evolve culture. The strength and stability of the culture depends upon the length of existence of social community, tenacity of the membership, and emotional intensity of experiences shared (Ross, 2010, p. 2). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) defined culture as “a social indoctrination of unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit in a particular group (p. 6).” These two authors elaborate on culture by suggesting that the culture defines normalcy and morality for its followers. They give an example of schools that have very similar policies in place, but how these policies are implemented defines the culture of the school (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015, p. 19).

**Benefits of a Positive Culture**

Vigorous schools have unique characteristics that are hospitable to the learning needs of the students. MacNeil et al. (2009) examined the difference of culture in
Exemplary, Recognized, and Acceptable schools. Their study concluded that students learn and achieve higher scores on standardized tests in a healthy learning environment. Inhospitable culture negatively influences student learning and their achievement suffers (p. 73). Stolp (1994) claimed that positive school culture correlates strongly with increased student achievement and motivation (p. 2).

Rai and Prakash (2014) maintained that quality culture delivers a physical and social setting that is safe, well planned, and caring. Teachers and staff make every effort to make teaching and learning an enjoyable experience for both the students and teachers (pp. 45–46). Ohlson et al. (2016) concluded that positive school culture decreases the number of suspensions, increases attendance rates, and enhances standardized test scores (p. 116). Quality culture helps students and teachers in all areas of academics and the school’s social settings.

Types of Cultures

There are different types of cultures that impact the effectiveness, morale, and performance of students and teachers. Brown (1993) pointed out that the two most commonly known school cultures are the culture of collaboration and the culture of isolation. Gruenert and Whitakar (2015) described the culture of isolation as a fragmented culture, and they defined it as individuals minding their own work without any interest in other peoples’ professional performances or experiences. Eaker and Keating (2008) suggested that teachers’ collaboration and their collective effort enhance instructional skills and advances student learning, and that the teachers’ professional lives are transformed when a school shifts from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration (p. 15). Likewise, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) asserted that collaborative...
school culture embraces learning for students and adults alike. In such a culture, teachers commit and take responsibility to improve professionally to enhance teaching and learning (p. 50).

Besides the culture of isolation and culture of collaboration, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) identified four more types of school cultures: comfortable-collaborative, contrived-collegial, balkanized, and toxic. A comfortable-collaborative culture values cooperation, courtesy, and compliance. Teachers and students work in small groups to learn and expect courteous learning behavior. In a contrived-collegial culture, leaders make suggestions to teachers to behave in a certain way, such as to work collaboratively. Teacher behavior is more regulated, and teacher efficacy, self-determination, and autonomy diminish. Though this culture is created to foster urgent behavioral corrections, it may reduce teacher motivation and cooperation. Balkanized culture appears in like-minded people who compete against those they perceive as rivals. This kind of culture may divide a school into cliques and can weaken the over-all mission and goal of the school. Last, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) explained toxic culture as a culture that promotes gossip, has low expectations of the students, engages in public humiliation of the student, and results in poor teacher performance (p. 50).

The Teacher’s Role in a Positive Culture

Teacher Collaboration

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) suggested that school culture must aid in enhancing student achievement, which should be the ultimate goal of schools. To attain this goal, teachers must collaborate to enhance teaching and learning. Collegial work and shared educational values produce better results (p. 66). Lange et al. (2012) maintained
that teacher collaboration is a prerequisite to improving student learning. Teacher collaboration should focus upon improving instruction so that the students master the material taught to them. The authors insist that this type of alliance as a team allows teachers to align assessment plans and reflect on discrepancies between expected and actual student achievement. It also paves a path for “universal” expectations and high student achievement (pp. 5–6). Ohlson et al. (2016) claimed that higher achieving schools demonstrate a culture that nurtures teachers’ collaboration, empowerment, and engagement (p. 116).

**Distributive Leadership and Collective Decision Making**

Ohlson et al. (2016) believed that student achievement can be increased by creating a culture that endorses a shared commitment to student success, a collective decision-making process, continuous professional growth, and a firm belief that all students can achieve success (p. 116). Lange et al. (2012) suggested that school leaders should empower teachers in collective decision making, help them to grow professionally, encourage shared responsibility, and assist in collaborating with colleagues (p. 5).

Distributive Leadership creates a healthy culture that promotes the overall performance of the teachers. Prokopchuk (2016) argued that distributive leadership provides a feeling of efficacy and worthiness. This type of practice among all stakeholders, including students and parents, promotes a communal focus for the greater good of the school. Increased motivation, trusting relationships, risk taking, a sense of community, and efficacy become part of the school’s everyday culture (p. 77).

**Job Satisfaction**
School culture has a great impact on teachers’ performance and job satisfaction. Tluściak-Deliowska and Dernowska (2015) concurred that teachers’ job satisfaction increases a positive school culture and promotes greater quality performance. They further elaborated that healthy school culture tenaciously holds a common goal, shared values, collegial support, collective decision making, and professional development (p. 216). Hornstein, Callahan, Fisch, and Benedict (1968) acknowledged that highest level of job satisfaction is reported by the teachers when they are valued and feel influential in the school system. When teachers perceive themselves as mutually important and influential as the principal, they will change their perception on workplace, values, and job satisfaction (p. 380).

When the teachers’ presence in school culture is not valued, teachers express work-related discontent. Tobin and Roth (2005) found that 40% of first-year teachers who left their profession express disappointment in the lack of induction and mentorship (p. 1). Leithwood and McAdie (2007) highlighted issues that impact teachers’ job dissatisfaction: work load, perceived complexity of work, negative school culture, school operating procedures, lack of community involvement, low salaries, and the absence of meaningful professional development (p. 43).

Efficacy and Commitment

Efficacy is one of the essential attributes of a teacher. De Jong, Moolenaar, Osagie and Phielix (2016) defined teacher self-efficacy as a teacher’s judgment about his or her own capacities to perform effectively in a given situation (p. 73). Awkard (2017) assessed that a teacher’s sense of efficacy is gained by engaging in the reflection process regarding practices and classroom expectations. A systematic process of reflection is
required to make effective adjustments to everyday practices and examine improvements in student learning (p. 54).

De Jong et al. (2016) believed that teachers’ efficacy is the predictor of student achievement. Teachers with a perception of high self-efficacy produce better student gains. Whereas, teachers with a perception of low self-efficacy yield poor classroom performance and easily give up in a crisis situation (p. 73). Ware and Kitsantas (2011) asserted that a decline in teacher efficacy is possible depending on the availability of instructional resources, collaboration with colleagues, and administrators’ support (p. 184).

Ware and Kitsantas (2011) held that teacher commitment is linked to the notion of internal motivation. Motivated teachers perform in schools with a positive attitude and their performance is self-rewarding. The authors add that less motivated teachers’ performance is associated with feelings of distress, alienation, and disengagement. Teachers’ low commitment results in ineffective behavior, such as low effort, and absenteeism (p. 183).

**Leadership and School Culture**

**Principals as Change Agents**

School leaders play a vital role in changing and sustaining school culture. School leaders must have the knowledge of the existing school culture, and if they desire a change, how they would navigate this change. MacNeil et al. (2009) considered principals to be change agents because these principals influence the culture of a school which indirectly effects student achievement. Principals who encourage and promote learning will transform a culture that supports higher student achievement.
School principals who choose to lead rather than just manage must first understand the school’s culture. It is important to realize that culture is complex because it has very unique and idiosyncratic ways of working. When an organization has a clear understanding of its purpose, why it exists and what it must do and who it should serve, the culture will ensure that things work well. When the complex patterns of beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations, ideas and behaviors in an organization are inappropriate or incongruent, the culture will ensure that things work badly. Successful school principals comprehend the critical role that the organizational culture plays in developing a successful school. (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 74)

Successful schools are consciously built by principals who understand the impact of positive and negative school culture. Stolp (1994) cautioned that leaders who desire to change their school’s culture must understand the existing culture first. Altering a culture without the understanding of the existing culture may create discord in relationships that are essential for the stability of the organization (p. 3). Ross (2010) asserted that understanding school culture is essential for leading a change successfully (p. 2). Eaker and Keating (2008) contended that “the challenge of changing culture is the challenge of changing behavior, of persuading people to act in new ways” (p. 16).

As a change agent, a principal demonstrates competency and leadership skills when altering school culture. Reeves (2009) recommended four crucial steps a leader should take to amend culture: define what will not change, portray adaptive actions and behavior, use “right tools,” and perform “scut work.” Reeves also suggested that, first, principals ought to start with values and traditions that will not change. He or she should
“place change in the context of stability” (Reeves, 2009, p. 38) Principals’ effective ability to articulate the changes decreases impediments perceived in the change process. Second, the author added that principals’ actions and behavior must not contradict the adaptive changes being implementing; there are new ways to be learned through the process. The leaders should not be the one to answer all the questions; rather, engage the staff in meaningful conversations to resolve and find new practices to implement during the change process. Third, a change leader must choose the right tools, such as ritual and traditions. Exerting “power tools,” such as threats and coercion will not benefit in altering a culture. Fourth, Reeves referenced that principals must involve themselves in “unglamorous or scut work” to ensure the change of the cultural. In other words, every job has value and cannot be seen as a trivial and everyone is involved (Reeves, 2009, pp. 38–40).

**Principals as Role Models**

Healthy school culture demands principals to behave in a way that promotes the wellbeing of the school. According to Karakose (2008), principals have to behave suited to school culture in accordance with cultural leadership, and they must be good models to teachers in connection with adapting to cultural values as they interact with staff and direct them towards the aims of the school. (p. 572)

Day, Gu, and Sammons (2016) pointed out that principals are responsible for creating and upholding school culture. Since school culture is a potent symbolic tool that influences teaching and learning, principals must model behavior. The authors claim that this behavior is noticed by the teachers and it is interpreted to be incorporated in their
professional lives. Deal and Peterson (1990) commented on the impact of the daily modeling of principals:

Their [principals] daily behavior and demeanor communicate their preference in quality teaching, admirable behavior, and desired cultural traditions. Teachers and students are particularly attentive to the values displayed and rewarded by the principal in moments of social or organizational crisis within the school. (p. 33)

**Principals as Instructional Leaders**

The Wallace Foundation (2011) surveyed 8,000 teachers and administrators and the survey results established school leadership as “the second most important influence on student learning, ranking only behind classroom instruction” (p. 63). Ross and Cozzens (2016) emphasized that instructional leaders must understand the importance of healthy school culture and how it impacts teachers’ instructional practices (p. 163). Manaseh (2016) posited that instructional leaders play a significant role in assisting, improving, and endorsing teachers’ classroom instructional practices and student achievement. The author complements that effective instructional leaders know what is taught in the classroom, help teachers’ build their capacities, and aid in diminishing teachers’ weaknesses (p. 32). Gedik and Bellibas (2015) suggested that instructional leadership should be distributed between the teachers and principal. This practice, distributive leadership, involves teachers working with the instructional leader, the principal, and together (p. 109). Teachers and principals working together will improve the culture of the school and their ultimate goal, student achievement.

**Communication**
A highly demanded attribute of an administrator is effective communication skills. Gimbel and Leana (2013) asserted that language can cultivate trust and uphold high standards. The foundation of ethical leadership is based upon a careful and thoughtful selection of words when communicating with staff, teachers, or parents (p. 2). The authors added that respectful speaking and listening make teachers feel trusted and valued. Dialogue amid principals and teachers should be open, honest, clear, and consistent. Gimbel and Leana (2013) suggested that principals should responsibly and accurately communicate with the teachers so as to build trusting relationships (p. 36).

Effective communication with teachers and staff is the core for transparency, trust, and the overall success of the school. Communication is the core element for creating and recreating a culture of success. Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, and Slavit (2011) reflected on their findings concerning re-culturing:

Our research suggests that when the adults in a school continually engage in dialogue and inquiry to support student learning, a re-culturing takes place. A result of this re-culturing, teachers take risks and tolerate a level of vulnerability in order to learn and enact productive change. (p. 23)

**School Reform**

Many school leaders aggressively worked on school reforms, and many of these reforms failed. MacNeil et al. (2009) offered a reason for failed reform efforts; they believed that student achievement in the last 30 years did not improve due to an inadequate emphasis on the importance of school culture and school climate. The main purpose of schools is to provide hospitable culture and climate that facilitate learning.
Unfortunately, educators were concentrating on structural changes not on schools’ cultural changes (p. 76).

MacNeil et al. (2009) insisted that structural transformations of schools that are not supported by schools’ cultural changes are bound to fail. School culture provides meaning and stability to the organization. MacNeil et al. stressed that reform efforts must concentrate on improving school culture, and by doing so, the school leaders will redirect and improve the outcomes of student learning and teacher performance (p. 77). Gurley, Anast-May, O’Neal, and Dozier (2016) assessed that “while effective leadership cannot guarantee successful education reform, research affirms that sustainable school improvement is seldom found without active, skillful, instructional leadership from principals and teachers” (p. 2).

**School Vision and Mission**

A school’s vision and mission are the guiding forces of the school community. Prokopchuk (2016) claimed that “part of building a positive school culture lays in creating a strong foundation based on a clearly stated mission and vision for the school and its stakeholders,” (p. 76). The author added that the school leaders must model the vision because it is the center of decision making (p. 76). Zakrzewski (2013) established that a great principal works with teachers and other stakeholders to create a shared vision for the school; doing this will increase the likelihood of the vision being followed by the school community. Deal and Peterson (2016) believed that “the school’s mission and purpose cast a shadow far beyond architectural form, artifacts, and the return words” (p. 29).
Building Trust

Routman (2015) stated that effective leaders lead by encouragement in a non-threatening way, creating a culture of trust and support. Teachers who trust their leader willingly work diligently to bring a positive change in the school (p. 2). Prokopchuk (2016) affirmed that a school principal must cultivate a culture of trust; trust is essential in building a healthy relationship with staff and students. A strong foundation of trust lays the groundwork to move learning forward (p. 77).

Gimbel and Leana (2013) encouraged administrators to invest time and energy in building and sustaining relationships with teachers and suggested that this can be done in myriad ways by effectively communicating and supporting teachers (p. 37). Lange et al. (2012) agreed that leaders who want to sustain a positive school culture must develop trust with and between teachers (p. 5). Prokopchuk (2016) identified three characteristics that are required for building a positive school culture that cultivates trust: respect, recognition, and risk taking. Prokopchuk added that a collegial relationship based on trust is a stable foundation upon which all elements of school culture are built (p. 78).

Summary

Culture is the driving force of the school community. Though the culture is invisible, it impacts all aspects of the school’s organization: teacher’s instruction, student’s learning, staff performance, and collective and individual attitudes. Culture penetrates seamlessly in teachers’ and administrators’ performance; therefore, it is imperative to consciously and aggressively promote and implement a healthy culture. Teachers’ job satisfaction depends on collegial relationships, productive collaboration, teachers’ autonomy, collective decision making, effective professional development, and
self-efficacy. Culture encompasses all areas of school performance; thus it effects student learning. The foundation of the school should be rooted in a positive culture that promotes communal commitment to student success.
SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

In this section, data collected to assess the Samad School’s culture is analyzed and interpreted. Data were gathered from survey results, small group discussion notes, and the exit slips that were completed by the teachers at a staff discussion of the survey data. The School Culture Triage Survey was completed by 16 out of 17 teachers at Samad; one teacher did not participate. The survey results were presented to the staff in an open meeting. During the meeting, teachers were grouped by grade clusters to review and discuss the survey results using the handouts provided (see Appendix F). Then, each grade cluster shared its feedback with the whole group. Afterwards, teachers were given an opportunity to express their individual thoughts and feelings about participating in the survey by responding to an exit slip. The interpretation given for each survey item includes the survey results, teacher comments from the small group discussions, and the exit slips. All survey and exit slip responses were kept anonymous throughout the entire data collection process.

The School Culture Triage Survey items are categorized into three school culture areas: professional collaboration, affiliative/collegial relationships, and self-determination. We will discuss each question’s results while incorporating the data collected from the small group discussions and the exit slips. Each Table includes the distribution specific item’s responses in percentage system, and the weighted average that represents the overall score. The items are rated with the Likert scale from one to five points; the highest weighted average that can be attained is 5.00 and the lowest is 1.00.
School Culture Triage Survey Areas

School Culture Area one: Professional Collaboration

Tables 1 through 5 display the quantitative data gleaned from the School Culture Triage Survey item responses related to professional collaboration. Example qualitative data responses gathered from discussion cluster group notes and individual exit slips are also presented.

Table 1

Item One: Teachers and Staff Discuss Instructional Strategies and Curriculum Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1, the weighted average for this item is 4.25. It is the highest rate for the professional collaboration category. Nearly 82% of the teachers at Samad School selected “Often” and “Always or almost always” as their response to regularly discuss instructional strategies and curricular issues at their school. However, the small group discussions and exit slips seemed to tell a different story. In the notes from these discussions, nearly 60% of the teachers expressed the need for more collaboration time for discussing instructional strategies and curricular issues. The following are some discussion group comments from the teachers:

“Everyone’s experience and expectations are different.”

“Many times teachers do not work together to plan and organize.”

“More time is needed.”
Exit slip comments also mentioned the need for extra time to collaborate. One teacher even went deeper to point out the effectiveness of these meetings: “Yes, we sometimes discuss issues related to instructions, [but] what are our next steps, what will happen after [the discussion] and who will follow up”?

In the exit slips, teachers expressed the need for more professional development to build their own capacity by learning new instructional strategies that they are getting from their colleagues. One teacher commented: “My hope is to introduce new instructional strategies for my students, while growing and improving my teaching.” Teachers indicated that when hiring new teachers, there is a need to consider the expertise and credentials of the new hires around curriculum and issues related to it. One teacher wrote: “We need to hire teachers [who] know the content and curriculum of the subject [area].”

It is imperative for teachers to discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues. The exchange of instructional strategies and the way the curriculum is delivered develop teachers’ capacity to reach all students even though they have diverse needs. Eaker and Keating (2008) supported the fact that teachers’ collaboration and their collective effort enhance instructional skills and advance student learning. Additionally, Eaker and Keating (2008) believed that the teachers’ professional lives are transformed when a school shifts from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration (p. 15).
Table 2

**Item Two: Teachers and Staff Work Together to Develop the School Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that teachers are involved in the development of school schedule. When combining the “Often” and “Always or almost always” selections, 69% of the teachers indicate they are involved in developing the school schedule. This item is weighted 3.93, the second highest in this category. However, again in the discussion notes and exit slips, while teachers said they are included in developing the school schedule, there was a problem with the schedule because it did not allow enough time for collaborating and working together. One teacher stated: “We need more in-service days for teachers to work together, not just plan and forget about it.” Another comment that surfaced from a group was: “During the summer break, when we are here for a week, all staff member should sit together and make the schedule. Discussion [time] is an integral part of scheduling.”

Teachers at Samad School recognized the importance of allocating time in the master schedule to discuss instructional strategies and work together. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (2011) emphasized the importance of the content in the master schedule that reflects the school culture and the professional practices at the school.
Table 3

Item Three: Teachers and Staff Are Involved in the Decision-Making Process with Regard to Materials and Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3, the rating of survey item three, when combining the “Often” and “Always or almost always” responses, shows that 70% of the staff is involved in the decision-making process. The weighted average score is 3.87. However, when compared to the small group discussions, some frustration about how decisions are made became evident. Some teachers felt that the decision-making process was top-down, and they are not invited to be a part of it. A member of one group commented: “The decisions are made by the board members and most of them have neither educational experiences nor teaching knowledge.” Another teacher in a cluster group wrote: “Many times new [teachers’] ideas are disregarded in favor of the administrator’s decisions.” Lange et al. (2012) emphasized that leaders should empower teachers by involving them in collective decision making, which supports their professional growth, and encourages shared responsibility, and positively influences their collaboration with their colleagues (p. 5).

Table 4

Item Four: The Student Behavior Code Is a Result of Collaboration and Consensus Among Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 shows that survey item four has a weighted average score of 3.81. Approximately 64% of respondents selected the “Often” and “Always or almost always” ratings. These data indicate that staff collaborate to create the student behavior code, and that discipline is not an issue at Samad School. However, nearly 38% of the teachers did not agree that the student behavior code is developed with input from staff. The exit slip comments indicated that there is a need for improvement in the student discipline code. A teacher offered the succinct response of “a little more strict on the discipline part” and the suggestion was made to include the discipline code in the school improvement action plan.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Five: The Planning/Organizational Time Allotted to Teachers and Staff Is Used to Plan as Collective Units/Teams Rather Than as Separate Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Never</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 5 for survey item five, the “Often” and “Always or almost always” ratings are selected by 63% of the staff. The weighted average score is 3.50. This score is the lowest in this category. One teacher cluster group expressed in their discussion notes that “we have a very supportive environment . . . the staff and admin work together and discuss [issues] to improve the school.” Nearly 25% of the staff believe they are not allotted the time to collaborate and plan together. This rating was surprising to the rest of the teachers as expressed in the small group discussion and their exit slips. In the discussion notes, there were two groups that were surprised that 44% of their colleagues think they “Always or almost always” work collaboratively. One group
wrote: “We discuss together but ‘almost always’ work separately.” Another group offered that the varied schedules of the teachers do not provide time to work collaboratively: “We are surprised that people would answer 44% ‘almost or always’ because many times teachers do not work together.” To emphasize their view, they underlined “do not work together.” Furthermore, teachers mentioned not having enough time to plan and collaborate either vertically or horizontally. The staff desire more teacher time for collaboration. One teacher wrote: “Fewer meetings, more time for teachers [to collaborate],” and a group responded: “We have much to do in limited time [to collaborate], too much workload and lack of communication.” Ohlson et al. (2016) noted that higher achieving schools demonstrate cultures that nurture teachers’ collaboration, empowerment, and engagement (p. 116).

School Culture Area Two: Collegial Relationships

Tables 6 through 10 display the quantitative data that surfaced from the School Culture Triage Survey item responses concerning collegial relationships. Example qualitative data responses gathered from discussion cluster group notes and individual exit slips are also presented.

Table 6

*Item Six: Teachers and Staff Tell Stories of Celebrations That Support the School’s Values*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first item of the collegial relationships area of school culture shows, in Table six, that teachers celebrate each other’s successes and the goals attained at the school. By combining the “Often” and “Always or almost always” scores, 75% of the teachers
indicate that it is a tradition to celebrate each other’s accomplishments and continuous achievements. The remaining 25% of staff may be new to the school and/or are not involved in telling the successful stories of themselves or others. It was surprising to one group of teachers that not all teachers agreed on this item: “Why [do the] members don’t agree [that] we have a rich tradition of celebrations?” Furthermore, another group commented that “this survey reflects our values.” The majority of the teachers at Samad School agreed that they have a culture of celebration and storytelling about the school’s successes.

Table 7

*Item Seven: Our School Reflects a True “Sense” of Community*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 7, the staff’s response to a sense of community is significant. The data show that 81% of the staff rate this item as “Often” and ‘Always or almost always.” There is strong agreement among the staff that the school reflects a true sense of community. All are working toward the same purpose and to the advantage of their students. One group summarized the sense of community well: “Most teachers feel a true sense of community.” Even though teachers feel that the school has a strong sense of community, one teacher cluster indicated some unevenness: “Some teachers feel that they belong or [are] accepted [in the school] more than others.” Prokopchuk (2016) affirmed that practices like taking responsibility and collaborating among all stakeholders, including students and parents, promote a communal focus for the greater good of the school. Additionally, a sense of community increases motivation, trusting
relationships, and risk taking (p. 77). Block (2009) explained that the “sense of community” and community wellbeing depend on the “level of social capital,” which is the “quality of the relationships” and the experiences that “connect” the citizens with one another for the achievement of all (p. 5).

Table 8

*Item Eight: Our Schedule Reflects Frequent Communication Opportunities for Teachers and Staff*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opportunities for staff to discuss instructional and curriculum issues are vital to school operation. As Table 8 evidences, about 32% of the teachers think that opportunities are not provided as much as they would like in the school schedule. This reflects the teachers’ responses to items 1, 2, and 5. Furthermore, teachers commented that communication opportunities are not frequent and are not reflected on their schedules. The following statements are examples of some cluster group notes regarding communication:

“The area of communication is very concerning.”

“The discrepancy in question 8 [is surprising] it clearly means that some teachers are heard or feel heard more than other [teachers].”

“[The survey results for items] 8 & 9 are surprising because the teachers and staff have very busy schedules to communicate.”

Another group focused on the obstacles preventing Samad School from attaining a high rating and one obstacle is that “the schedules for teachers are so varied [to cooperate].”
The individual staff exit slips offered comments on communication as well:

“[We] need more communication between teachers and administration.”

“We need more time to communicate.”

“The response to this question was surprising to me because the teachers and staff have very busy schedule to communicate.”

Teachers also reflected that communication lines among all stakeholders are needed. They wanted to have scheduled times to communicate directly with the all stakeholders: the administration, the board members, and parents. On one exit slip, a teacher suggested including in the school improvement plan “workshops on internal & external communications between administration and teachers and also between the board and the administration.”

Johnson, Reinhorn, and Simon (2016) asserted that “one of the most important conditions that ensure team success was having a schedule that provided regular, reliable meeting times” (p. 25). Block (2009) declared that the most important aspect of building a community is the “conversation it chooses to have with itself.” The conversations and the communications among all stakeholders in the school create the school culture and enlighten the purpose of why we are here (p. 52).
Table 9

*Item Nine: Our School Supports and Appreciates Sharing of New Ideas by Members of Our School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 9, item nine reflects the teachers’ perceptions around appreciating and supporting new ideas. As can be seen, approximately 60% of the teachers select “Often” or “Always or almost always.” However, as expressed in their small group reflections, many teachers felt that new ideas are discouraged and not supported. One group cluster wrote: “Sometimes the ideas are not accepted. Yes, it does raise a concern.” Another group expressed the same concern: “Many times new ideas are disregarded in favor of the administration’s decisions.” On an exit slip, a teacher wrote: “My hope is that the school will be open to a new vision which will include [the voice of] teachers from every grade level. [We need] more open door policy and better relationship between staff & admin.”

When teachers feel that their ideas are not appreciated or supported, they feel less motivated. Ware and Kitsantas (2011) maintained that teacher commitment is linked to internal motivation. Motivated teachers perform in schools with a positive attitude and their performance is self-rewarding. Additionally, less motivated teachers’ performance is associated with feelings of distress, alienation, and disengagement. Teachers’ weak commitment results in ineffective behavior, such as, low effort and absenteeism (p. 183).

Lange et al. (2012) encouraged leaders to empower teachers with collective decision making, help in growing professionally, encourage shared responsibility, and assist in collaborating with colleagues (p. 5).
Item Ten: There Is a Rich and Robust Tradition of Rituals and Celebrations, Including Holidays, Special Events, and Recognition of Goal Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon review of Table 10, item ten is the highest rating item in the whole survey. Table 10 shows that approximately 88% of the teachers select “Sometimes,” “Often,” “And always/almost always” on the survey. Most teachers agree that it is a cultural norm for teachers to appreciate each other and celebrate other’s work successes at Samad School. The weighted Likert average is 4.52, which correlates with the teachers’ perceptions on the “sense of community” at their school. Table 10 also shows that 13% of the teachers select “Sometimes,” but it is important to note that none of the teachers select “Never” or “Rarely.” As revealed in the following examples of group discussion notes, many teachers confirm that they appreciate and trust each other:

“We do have a lot of special days that we celebrate.”

“We have a very supportive environment. Admin and staff work together as a team [hard work is acknowledged].”

“[It was] not surprising [to us to have a high score, we] think that members value [each other] and are interdependent on each other.”

As mentioned previously, Prokopchuk (2016) affirmed that trust and respect, recognition, and risk taking are requirements for building a positive school culture, and that a collegial relationship based on trust is a stable foundation upon which all elements of school culture are built (p. 78). Lange et al. (2012) suggested that to sustain a positive
school culture, trust must be developed with the leadership and between teachers (p. 5). Furthermore, Gimbel and Leana (2013) encouraged administrators to invest time and energy in building and sustaining relationships with teachers, and suggested that this can be done in myriad ways by effectively communicating and supporting teachers (p. 37).

**School Culture Area Three: Efficacy or Self-Determination**

Tables 11 through 16 display the quantitative data collected from the School Culture Triage Survey item responses concerning efficacy or self-determination. Example qualitative data responses gathered from discussion cluster group notes and individual exit slips are also presented.

Table 11

*Item Eleven: When Something Is Not Working in Our School, the Faculty and Staff Predict and Prevent Rather Than React and Repair*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 displays the response data gathered regarding problem solving. This item’s weighted average is the lowest in the whole survey with a 3.12 Likert score. The data show that teachers do not take the initiative to identify and solve problems that come up, but rather wait until the principal calls attention to what appears to be the problem. The collected qualitative data from the staff meeting confirmed these quantitative results for this item, as exemplified in the following two group statements:

“[The] majority of the time we react and repair when a problem occurs, instead of having policies in place to prepare for contingencies.”
“[It is surprising in] answers to question 11 in the survey, [that] 23% [of] people feel we [are] pre-emptively fixing problems when we don’t.”

A third group wrote, “[the response to] # 11 is surprising; they [the staff] wait to solve problems [and] do not predict [them],” but then another group claimed “we ‘almost/always’ try to predict and prevent problems before they occur.” The contrasting opinions in these data suggest that teachers hold different perceptions about what is working or not working in the school, and how teachers identify, prevent, or repair what is not working. In any case, these wide variations in the perceptions of teachers reveal that this is not a strong area of the school operation.

Table 12

Item Twelve: School Members Are Interdependent and Value Each Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the qualitative data in Table 12, teachers at Samad School mostly agree that school members are interdependent and value each other. Of the staff, 82% view themselves as being interdependent and valuing each other “Often” or “Always or almost always.” However, 19% of the teachers feel differently, selecting the response of “Sometimes.” In the qualitative data from group discussion notes, one of group of teachers reported that “we are not surprised 63% of the members value [each other] and are interdependent of each other.” They expressed surprise though that the percentage was not higher. Another group wrote that “number 12 is not surprising. We value each other.” A third group recorded that “we are a community school; we appreciate [each other] and work together . . . we always do it for the betterment [of the school].” The
qualitative data surface affirmation of interdependence but not feeling valued, as in
notations such as “Interdependent—yes, but the staff members are undervalued and
underpaid”; and [there is] “a disconnect between the board who decide a lot of things and
the teachers. Our opinions are not valued.”

Table 13

*Item Thirteen: Members of Our School Community Seek Alternatives to Problems/Issues
Rather Than Repeating What We Have Always Done*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 shows that approximately 69% of the teachers think they “Often” and
“Always or almost always” seek alternatives to problems rather than repeat what they
have always done. Combining the “Rarely” and “Sometimes” responses shows that
nearly 25% of the teachers believe that the school community *does not* seek alternatives
to problems, but rather repeat the same practices. Contradicting the quantitative survey
data, the qualitative data from the small group discussions indicate that many teachers
think the school community *does not* work as a problem-solving team and they *do not*
have alternative plans in place if a problem arises. One group believes “we can change”;
however, on the exit slips, many teachers also express their fears of coming back to
school the next year unprepared and repeating the same practices.

Teacher fears about repeating the same old practices and not seeking alternatives
are evidenced in the following written qualitative data responses:

“My fears are that we will start the school year the same as last year. We are not
discussing issues.”
“My fear is that like every year, we will be unprepared. [We need] more preparation from the start of the school year! Better management in the school [is needed].”

“Teachers are not aware of what classes they are teaching until the very last minute (the night before the new school year starts). This really affects the teachers in terms of organizing/planning [for] the school year.”

“My fear, nothing is going to change. We need more people to work as administrators; now, sometimes teachers do administrative work. [My fear going into the new school year is] lack of a plan.”

“[We need] more designated staff for organization.”

“Instead of following the old ways, [the] school needs to adapt new ways.”

Given the difference of opinion revealed in the two data sources about perceptions of change, it is somewhat understandable that there may not be a sense of urgency regarding seeking alternative practices, thus creating fertile ground for frustrations to grow.

Table 14

*Item Fourteen: Members of Our School Community Seek to Define the Problem/Issue Rather Than Blame Others*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 14, almost 76% (“Often” and “Always or almost always”) of teachers surveyed indicate that their school community seeks to define a problem before attributing it to other community members’ failures. A group made the following suggestion in their discussion notes: “Be open, discuss, [and] talk to other staff
members. Discuss it with the principal. This is a community school and we always do it for the betterment.” This is the only comment any group wrote in the discussion notes or on exit slips regarding the issue of blaming others for a problem.

Table 15

*Item Fifteen: The School Staff Is Empowered to Make Instructional Decisions Rather Than Waiting for Supervisors to Tell Them What to Do*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 shows there is disagreement among teachers regarding feeling empowered to make instructional decisions. This disparity of opinion is evident in 50% of the teachers selecting the response “Always or almost always,” and nearly 40% selecting the response “Rarely” or “Sometimes,” providing evidence that not all of the Samad teachers feel empowered to make instructional decisions. In survey Item 1, teachers respond that they are provided opportunities to discuss instructional strategies. However, when compared to the Item 15 responses, a significant percentage of teachers feel they are not empowered to make instructional changes. According to the qualitative data collected from the cluster groups’ reasoning for the quantitative rating, the diversity among the teachers’ experiences and expertise may contribute to the quantitative results in this item. One group wrote: “Everyone’s experiences and expertise are different.” Another group wrote: “Everyone has a different personality and experiences. What we [might] see right, someone else [might] see it wrong.”

Several cluster group and exit slip comments offer further elaboration on some teachers feeling a lack of empowerment:
“Instructional decisions are made by the supervisors and many times by the board members.”

“Our culture demands that management makes decisions and we just follow rules.”

“[I hope] our voices will be heard.”

“[There is a] disconnect between the board who decides [about] a lot of things and teachers.”

“The school needs to appreciate and respect teachers.”

Empowering teachers to make decisions and take risks is needed to build capacity and competency. Ohlson et al. (2016) noted that high-achieving schools nurture teachers’ collaboration, empowerment, and engagement (p. 116). Lange et al. (2012) confirmed that when leaders empower teachers in collective decision making, it helps teachers grow professionally, own shared responsibility, and work collaboratively with colleagues (p. 5).

Table 16

*Item Sixteen: People Work Here Because They Enjoy It and Choose to Be Here*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
<th>No answer</th>
<th>Weighted average on a 5.00 Likert scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 16, 69% of the staff chooses the response “Often” and “Always or almost always,” indicating that they enjoy and choose to be at Samad School. The cluster group and exit slip qualitative data support the quantitative data. One teacher cluster group reported: “Yes, we chose to be here.” However, many teachers noted in the discussion and exit slip responses that there are issues of concern, such as salary, sick
days, and administrative support or mentoring. Another group of teachers wrote in their
discussion notes that “people who work here, do enjoy working here. However, they
would enjoy it more if the overall environment improves in terms of communication and
respect.”

Teacher dissatisfaction may contribute to the high turnover rate at Samad School.
A group of teachers offered a remedy for their dissatisfaction: “We need a better
administrative set up and designated people to keep the teachers connected and
motivated. The principal has too much on her plate.” Approximately 38% of the
teachers confirmed they are not satisfied with the salary and number of sick days. One
person commented on an exit slip that “sick days are not enough. Plus, we stay certain
days for longer hours without extra pay.” Another teacher echoed the complaint about
the sick day policy and the need for change: “More sick days and especially the pay
deductions if we have to leave early for any reason.”

**Summary**

Data compiled from the survey, group discussions, and the exit slip responses
were presented under the three categories in the Triage School Culture Survey:
Professional Collaboration, Collegial Relationships, and Self- efficacy and Self-
Determination. Results for each area are summarized.

**Professional Collaboration**

The professional collaboration category results showed average weights of 3.87;
Likert scale indicates this category as a high score. The teachers perceived professional
collaboration as a regular practice at the school. However, these results were counter to
the teachers’ qualitative feedback. The teachers expressed the need for time to collaborate and to be a part of the decision-making process.

**Collegial Relationship**

In the collegial relationship section of the survey, the overall weighted average was 4.01; this was the highest average score in all three categories. The weighted average is an indicator that Samad School has a positive culture and community. Block (2009) explained that social fabric is built “when citizens care for each other, and they become accountable for each other. Care and accountability create a healthy community” (p. 30).

Teachers expressed their strong bonding and sense of community. The results from the teachers’ qualitative feedback complimented the quantitative survey results; there was no clash between the two data source results. Teachers at Samad School have a sense of community and have built strong collegial relationships.

**Self-Determination and Efficacy**

The self-determination and efficacy section of the survey depicted the overall weighted average to be 3.96; teachers thought that they had the autonomy to make instructional decisions and define problems. Results from the teachers’ qualitative feedback were in conflict with the quantitative survey scores. The teachers expressed the need for a protocol that could be followed in case of a probable event. Because there are no procedures to follow, teachers felt unable to prevent predicted problems. Additionally, teachers expressed that they could not independently make instructional decisions without the principals’ approval. They felt that they needed support and
mentoring from administrators. The weighted average is an indicator that Samad School has a positive culture and community.

Tobin and Roth (2005) concluded that 40% of first year teachers who left their professions express discontent over the lack of induction and mentorship (p. 1). Thluściak-Deliowska and Dernowska (2015) asserted that job satisfaction increases a positive school culture while influencing a quality performance, and a healthy school culture tenaciously holds a common goal, shared values, collegial support, collective decision making, and professional development (p. 216). However, Hornstein et al. (1968) argued that the highest level of job satisfaction is reported by the teachers when they are valued and feel influential in the school system. When teachers perceive themselves to be as mutually important and influential as the principal, they will change their perception of the workplace and they will attain job satisfaction (p. 380). Conversely, in a school culture where teachers’ presence is not valued and acknowledged, teachers express work-related discontentment.

The aggregated quantitative and qualitative data suggested that Samad School falls under the Contrived-Collegial culture category. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) described this culture as leadership dominated, where the leader directs the staff members’ behavior and enforces collaboration. Though this culture appears to support new approaches and techniques, it conflicts with effective practices; this reduces teachers’ motivation and builds resistance to change (p. 54).

In our opinion, this reflects a “contrived-collegial culture.” According to Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), in a contrived-collegial culture, the leader makes suggestions to teachers regarding how to behave in a certain way, such as to work
collaboratively. Teachers’ behavior is more regulated and consequently, teachers’
efficacy, self-determination, and autonomy diminish. Though this culture is created to
foster urgent behavioral corrections, it may reduce teacher motivation and cooperation.
(p. 50). Awkard (2017) suggested that a teacher’s sense of efficacy is gained by
engaging in the reflection process regarding practices and classroom expectations. A
systematic process of reflection is required to make effective adjustments to everyday
practices and examining improvements in student learning (p. 54).

Overall, teachers rated Samad School as having a positive school culture. One
hundred percent of the teachers at Samad School felt a sense of community and
collegiality, which is the strong foundation for creating a healthy culture and immediately
initiating effective practices. However, small group discussion comments and exit slip
feedback told a little different story. Using these positive characteristics as a base, the
leader of Samad School can implement change that further improves teaching and
learning. Additionally, Samad School can invite all stakeholders to partake in the
schools’ decision making. Support from all stakeholders is the key for improving a
school’s functionality and student learning. Student learning is the ultimate goal of
Samad School.
SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

Introduction

In this section, we used Wagner’s (2006) change leadership model to create a vision to improve the culture at Samad School. This model entails the 4 C’s: Context Culture, Conditions, and Competencies. In each component of the change leadership model, we will present the vision to transform and create a healthy culture for all stakeholders.

Context

Samad School’s foundation is embedded in Islamic beliefs, and the school serves as an ideal example of a private Islamic School. This accredited school is advertising its presence in the Muslim community so as to promote student enrollment. Samad School has a diverse student population from various socioeconomic statuses. To serve this diverse Muslim student population, the school welcomes and recruits culturally and ethnically diverse teachers, principals, and board members to work in all areas of the school’s organization and operation.

Samad School encourages community involvement and support. The supportive community responds to clear communications and becomes actively involved in all school events. All stakeholders work together as a committed team to improve student learning. Samad School is an example of all stakeholders working in harmony to bring positive changes to school culture. The ultimate focus of this unity is to increase student achievement and to produce responsible citizens.

A culturally and racially diverse student population is found at Samad School such as, Malaysian, Indian, Pakistani, Arabian, and Somalian. Samad School’s core
belief is that all students can learn regardless of their economic status or ethnic background. The school views its diversity as a strength and utilizes it to promote democratic values and a healthy culture.

Students’ standardized test scores are escalating and student achievement is exceeding as projected. Additionally, all students have strong proficiency in spoken and written English. The teachers are the cornerstone of the institution; Samad School respects and values them. Teachers’ contributions to the academic success of their students have increased their efficacy and job satisfaction. The school has a low teacher turnover rate; teachers are provided an opportunity for collaboration, time for classroom preparations, freedom for collective decision making, and an incremental increase in salary every year.

**Conditions**

Samad School employs only certified teachers who have proficiency in their subject knowledge and cultural literacy. Samad School is student centered and 21st century standards are incorporated to close the achievement gap. Teachers are designing data-driven lesson plans and rigorous curriculums. They are allotted reasonable time to collaborate with other teachers and to attend effective professional development seminars. Samad School is providing sufficient funds and resources to support teachers’ professional development and classroom instruction. Additionally, Samad School practices distributive leadership. Teachers’ voices are heard, and they are included in the collective decision-making process.

Teachers are given 11 paid sick days and four personal days off. Substitute teachers are available upon request. Teachers’ salaries are incrementally increasing and
other incentives are provided for further professional growth. Samad School supports teachers in all areas of their profession and has dramatically reduced teachers’ attrition.

All stakeholders are a part of shaping the vision and mission for the school. Collectively designed vision and mission bring pride to the school community. All stakeholders are committed to implementing and maintaining the vision and mission of the school. Collective work is essential for effective school operation.

Sufficient staff is provided for smooth school operation. All the required support is included in a strategic improvement plan prepared by the stakeholders. Each department has a clear and concise performance role; no overlapping burden is placed on teachers or administrators, and the delegation of duties is established.

**Competencies**

Continual development and understanding of instructional skills are important for both teachers and administrators. All teachers are certified within Illinois. Teachers are equipped with effective instructional strategies for English speakers and for second language learners. Administrators and teachers have knowledge of effective instructional strategies used in the classroom. Administrators’ strategic support and frequent teacher observations assist in providing meaningful feedback. An administrator’s effective feedback enhances teachers’ performance in the classroom for better student learning.

Wiggins (2012) maintained that the key to effective feedback is “tangible and transparent, actionable, user-friendly (specific and personalized), timely, ongoing, and consistent (p. 10).”

Additionally, teachers and administrators are keeping up with the new and emerging knowledge in their field by consistently being involved in professional growth.
Efficacy and self-determination are qualities that are found in all teachers and administrators at Samad School.

**Culture**

Samad School’s vision and mission promotes a positive school culture. All stakeholders value and implement the vision and mission they have collectively designed. All stakeholders maintain a healthy school culture that focuses on the growth of students, teachers, and administrators. Teachers and administrators embrace accountability for all students’ learning.

Positive school culture holds high expectations for each student. Teachers and administrators genuinely believe that all students can and have the ability to learn. Teachers’ undeterred belief in their students’ success is the essence of Samad School’s success. Teachers’ genuine efforts and commitment hold them responsible for student learning. Embracing accountability for student learning is part of Samad School’s culture.

Trust is the foundation of the school’s culture; it promotes collegiality, collaboration, and unconditional support to enhance teaching and learning. There is a trusting relationship between all stakeholders because the culture of school is focused on student achievement and is supported by all stakeholders. Trust also promotes creativity, innovation, and clear communication that help in solving problems collectively. Issues that arise bring unity among the stakeholders and matters are respectfully discussed in a democratic way. Our trusting culture binds all stakeholders together as one unit to take Samad School forward.
SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

Introduction

To transform Samad School from “AS IS” (see Appendix A) to a vision of “TO BE” (see Appendix B) (Wagner et al., 2006) will require identifying, planning for, and setting in motion a set of technical and strategic changes to improve school culture. Culture change is not easy, especially in the beginning. According to Heifetz, Grasow, and Linsky (2009), to be successful, cultural change requires adaptive leadership and “adaptive work demands three very tough human tasks: figuring out what to conserve from the past practices, figuring out what to discard from the past practices, and inventing new ways that build from the best of the past” (p. 69).

Leaders who desire to change their school’s culture must understand the existing culture first (Stolp, 1994). Altering a culture without first understanding the existing culture may create discord in relationships that are essential for the stability of the organization (p. 3). While understanding school culture is essential for leading change successfully (Ross, 2010), it is only the beginning; planned, purposeful action must follow. Eaker and Keating (2008) stressed that “the challenge of changing culture is the challenge of changing behavior, of persuading people to act in new ways” (p. 16). Getting people to change their behavior, especially when they have been doing something the same way for years, is never easy. It takes planning and foresight on the part of the change leader. To bring everyone on board with the need for change, when planning and implementing change strategies and actions, Reeves (2009) recommended the following: “create short-term wins. . . . recognize effective practices. . . . emphasize effectiveness. . .
and make the case for change compelling and associate it with moral imperatives rather than compliance with external authority” (pp. 90–93).

As the primary change leader, the principal cannot make these changes alone. Improving school culture involves including all stakeholders to create and model the communal commitment necessary to realize the envisioned collaborative culture. In Figure 1, we propose four primary strategies and actions as the basis of a plan for improving the culture at Samad School to benefit all stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, and the entire school community. We believe these strategies will lead to increased teacher effectiveness, build instructional capacity, and elevate feelings of professional efficacy and job satisfaction among teachers and staff. More importantly, we believe the strategies and actions outlined in this nascent action plan will ultimately have a positive impact on both adult and student learning at Samad School.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revisit and update the school’s mission and vision statements with all stakeholders collaboratively</td>
<td>Principal invites and convenes an ad hoc representative group of stakeholders to participate in reviewing and updating the school’s mission and vision. School adopts a policy to revisit the school’s mission and vision every three years to meet changing needs and realities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Enhance K-12 curriculum coherence and improve instructional practices    | • Principal invites and convenes a K-12 representative group of teachers to serve on the Samad School Instructional Leadership Team (ILT).  
• The ILT identifies and seeks solutions for instructional deficits or organizational inefficiencies that may be negatively impacting student achievement.  
• The ILT creates, supervises, and evaluates the success of a yearly School Improvement Plan (SIP).  
• The ILT meets regularly (biweekly or monthly) to plan and monitor academic initiatives in support of the school’s mission and vision, improve instructional practices, and progress toward SIP goals.  
• As needed, the ILT invites teachers from grade-cluster or subject area Professional Learning Communities (PLCs, see Strategy Three) to collaboratively plan and monitor progress of initiatives to improve instruction and greater K-12 curriculum coherence through curriculum mapping.  
• Teachers in PLCs meet monthly to:  
  • Create curriculum maps to ensure that the curriculum is aligned both vertically and horizontally;  
  • Identify, share, and try out best practice instructional strategies;  
  • Identify and analyze data to inform instruction and lesson planning. |
| Review and update organizational systems, policies, and procedures to increase efficiency and enhance communication | Principal invites and convenes an ad hoc committee of stakeholders (TBD) to review and update existing systems, policies, and procedures to address current personnel, regulatory, and fiscal realities. Committee identifies sources of summative and formative data to be used to assess K-12 grade level and/or subject area achievement and identify areas in need of instructional improvement. |
To enhance communication, transparency and accountability, the committee creates a standard meeting protocol to be used schoolwide for all meetings (e.g., minutes are taken and submitted to the principal that include the purpose for the meeting, who attended, what was discussed, what was decided, next steps, who will do what, and when).

To maximize the use of time and available teaching resources, working with the ILT, each year the committee reviews the daily and weekly in-school schedule for greater efficiencies.

| Plan and enact professional development to grow and normalize a culture of professionalism among teachers and administrators. | Principal invites teachers and convenes a K-12 Professional Development Committee (PDC). The purpose of the PDC is to grow a culture of professionalism at Samad School. This is done through systematically planning professional development designed to continuously build instructional and leadership capacity within the school. The PDC surveys teachers annually to identify instructional and professional development needs. Working with the ILT, the PDC plans professional development to support the school’s mission and vision, School Improvement Plan (SIP), and meet requirements for Common Core State Standards. |

Figure 1. Strategies and actions to improve school culture and academic achievement.

Change Strategies

Strategy 1: Review and Update the School’s Mission and Vision Statements

Reviewing and updating the school’s mission and vision statements are important first steps when laying a foundation from which changes designed to improve school culture and performance may be launched. Inviting stakeholders to review the school’s mission and vision evokes and unleashes feelings of personal, professional, and communal efficacy and worth. Communal consensus, focus, and commitment create a more accepting, positive attitude among stakeholders while allowing them to stretch their
imaginations to envision and enact the changes necessary to realize a re-vitalized mission and vision for the school (Prokopchuk, 2016).

To effectively implement and maintain the school’s updated mission and vision, achievable short-term goals need to be put in place to monitor progress toward this goal. The school should periodically revise the mission and vision to suit the demographic and cultural changes occurring in the school and the broader school community at large. To ensure maximum buy-in from stakeholders, the school board, principal, teachers, and community, all should agree when to update the school’s mission and vision. That being said, to keep the school’s mission and vision vital, alive, and meaningful, we recommend that it be reviewed every three years.

Strategy 2: Enhance K-12 Curriculum Coherence and Improve Instructional Practices

To enhance K-12 curriculum coherence and improve instructional practices, the principal invites and convenes a K-12 representative group of teachers to serve on the Samad School Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT assists the principal in identifying and seeking solutions for instructional deficits or organizational inefficiencies that may be having a negative impact on student achievement. Teachers will be given the opportunity to select a grade cluster or subject area representative to serve on the ILT. With input and collaboration from the grade-cluster PLCs, the ILT will recommend new curricula and curriculum updates and plan and monitor the implementation of best practice instruction K-12. To institute data-driven decision making, the ILT will also regularly meet and confer with the PLCs to identify, analyze, and discuss student achievement data, instruction improvement, and the teachers’ professional development needs.
Curriculum mapping. Samad School currently has curriculum maps for each subject area. However, these maps are not aligned with Common Core State Standards. We recommend Samad School update the existing curriculum maps that were initially designed to meet the unique mission and vision of a private Islamic school to include the K-12 Common Core State Standards. To ensure core academic benchmarks are being addressed and met at each grade level and to maximize the potential for continual yearly academic growth, the curriculum must be coherently aligned both vertically (up and down between upper and lower grades) and horizontally (across same grade-level classrooms). To ensure that curriculum coherence (planned content scope and sequence) is achieved through curriculum mapping and is maintained and working, we recommend the ILT meet quarterly with grade-level PLCs to discuss progress toward achieving expected academic goals.

School improvement plan (SIP). With input from grade-cluster PLCs, each year the ILT creates, implements, and monitors the impact of a school improvement plan (SIP). A yearly SIP sets and keeps the school on a continuous improvement cycle. Designed to realize-in-action the mission and vision of the school, using a consensus prioritization of need, a SIP may include organizational, academic, curricular, or instructional goals and objectives, along with an action plan to be used to implement the SIP. Committees and individuals responsible for leading, overseeing, and evaluating the outcome of the SIP are clearly identified beforehand.

Principal as lead learner. Today’s school principal is an instructional leader above all (Reeves, 2009). The principal is not only responsible for the academic achievement of students, but for the professional and instructional growth of the adults
(teachers and administrators) in the school as well. Students can rise only as far as the expertise of their teachers can help take them. While the principal is the driving force behind both teacher and student growth, she or he also needs to be continually learning and growing, especially as an instructional leader. By making a habit of regularly participating in professional development with the teachers, a principal comes to be seen as the “lead learner” in the school. In modeling instructional leadership, principals play a significant role in encouraging teachers to continually improve their professional and instructional practices. Learning with, rather than giving directives from afar, effective principals diminish teachers’ weaknesses while building instructional capacity in the school as a whole (Manaseh, 2016).

**Strategy 3: Review and Update Organizational Systems, Policies, and Procedures**

An institution’s mission and vision, organizational systems, polices, and procedures play significant roles in shaping and determining its culture. We believe that examining organizational systems, policies, and procedures is a good foundational first step toward improving school culture. Therefore, we recommend the Samad principal invite and convene an ad hoc committee of teachers and stakeholders (TBD) to review and update the existing organizational systems, policies, and procedures to determine if they address and meet current school personnel, regulatory, and fiscal realities. Increasing organizational efficiency and communications improves the culture of the school at the same time. Clarity of purpose and consistency in application is key. The role of the committee is to identify policies or procedures in need of updating and to recommend for school board approval, new language on how and when to take action to invoke the policy.
Beyond school governance and building operations, policies, systems and procedures to enact and implement curriculum initiatives need to be clear, concise, and consistent. The end result is not only greater operational efficiency, but increased stakeholder buy-in through a shared understanding of why and how the organization functions as it does and what it stands for. Communally derived and shared understandings operationalize institutional norms and values. These understandings define “how we do things around here” and thus significantly shape the culture of the organization.

When collaboratively agreed upon systems, policies, and procedures are in place, a clear path to success is opened; ambiguity of action is lessened for Samad teachers and staff. Teachers and PLCs are freed to focus attention on the professional work ahead, rather than be left wondering how to raise and address perceived organizational, curricular, or instructional problems.

To improve school culture and academic achievement at Samad School, we recommend that three organizational systems be adopted: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Data-driven Assessment, and Teacher Supervision and Support.

**Professional learning communities (PLCs) system.** Professional learning communities are the structural and operational basis for a two-way, top-down/bottom-up professional school culture (DuFour, 2004). To be authentic, responsive, and meaningful, a school’s professional culture must be created and led from the top (administration) and bottom (teachers). As a form of distributive leadership, PLCs relieve the principal from carrying the entire burden of leading change by shifting and sharing leadership and responsibility across the school (Prokopchuk, 2016). PLCs tap
into and ultimately build the knowledge, expertise, skills, and leadership ability already present in the school.

To be effective, PLCs require regularly scheduled meeting times (daily, weekly, or monthly). PLCs review achievement data, identify and define curricular or instructional problems, propose and field-test solutions, and when necessary, meet with other PLCs, the principal, and/or board members in collaborative decision making. This is distributive leadership; it requires and develops trust, thus encouraging professional risk-taking.

That being said, PLCs must do more than meet; they must also produce. As one Samad survey discussion group wrote: “Yes, we meet and discuss, but no action steps and follow-up take place.” To ensure accountability, transparency, and follow-through, we recommend Samad PLCs publish minutes of meetings using a standard protocol (e.g., purpose for the meeting, who attended, what was discussed, what was decided, next steps, and who is responsible for doing what and when). Kennedy et al. (2011) offered the following observation regarding school culture:

Our research suggests that when the adults in a school continually engage in dialogue and inquiry to support student learning, a re-culturing takes place. As a result of this re-culturing teachers take risks and tolerate a level of vulnerability in order to learn and enact productive change. (p. 23)

**Data-driven assessment.** PLCs exist to promote learning and raise academic achievement for all. However, in order to do this, PLCs require ready access to student achievement data to guide and inform instruction. A system that identifies both formative and summative sources of K-12 data is needed. These data sources help guide
instructional decision-making. With the data directly in front of them, PLCs collaboratively analyze the data, looking for strengths and weaknesses, and then make the instructional adjustments called for to meet student needs. A data-driven assessment system would include policies and procedures about what, when, and how data will be collected and analyzed. Analyzing and making instructional decisions based upon data leads to a greater sense of professionalism among teachers. As professionals, teachers take more responsibility for student performance, hold themselves accountable, and continually reflect on their teaching.

**Teacher supervision and support.** Turnover of faculty at Samad School is high. Most teachers say they teach at Samad because they like being there and believe in its mission, vision, and goals. However, many still leave each year for better pay and are replaced by new group of younger, less-experienced teachers. Such turnover makes it difficult to build and sustain a positive and effective school culture. However, more teachers might be induced to stay if they felt they were working in a positive, supportive environment and knew they were growing professionally each year. The pride and satisfaction that is experienced when teaching in a school whose mission and vision you share makes teachers want to come to school each day.

To help retain both veteran and new teachers and to build instructional capacity within school faculty, we recommend school administration create a teacher supervision and support system designed to improve teachers’ performance regardless of years of teaching experience. The system would use a “differential supervision” (DiPaola & Hoy, 2012) approach to tailor and differentiate supervision strategies to support a teaching faculty with widely-varying experience and performance levels.
A supervisory leadership role for the principal and a supportive mentoring role for veteran teachers are recommended. On the role of the principal, Manaseh (2016) pointed out that effective instructional leaders know what is taught in the classroom, help teachers’ build their capacities, and aid in diminishing teachers’ weaknesses (p. 32). On the effect of collaborative support and mentoring, Ware and Kitsantas (2011) asserted that declines in teacher efficacy can be linked to a lack of availability of instructional resources, collaboration with colleagues, and administrators’ support (p. 184).

**Strategy 4: Professional Development to Grow a Culture of Professionalism**

To grow a culture of professionalism among Samad teachers and administrators, we recommend the principal convene a K-12 Professional Development Committee (PDC) to build instructional and leadership capacity within the school. Working with the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) each year, the PDC plans professional development for teachers and administrators to support the school’s mission and vision, the school improvement plan (SIP), and to meet Common Core State Standards.

**Bilingual/English language learners.** We recommend professional development to help teachers acquire skills and strategies needed to be effective teaching English language learners (ELL). Samad School has a large ELL student population, many with limited vocabulary and understanding of the English language. To better serve these students, teachers need to have targeted and sustained professional development so as to gain the necessary classroom teaching skills and knowledge needed to help all of Samad’s bilingual students excel academically.

**Teacher and administrator leadership.** Finally, we recommend professional development to grow and refine teachers’ and administrator’s leadership knowledge,
skills, and dispositions (Lambert. 2003). With distributed leadership and the proposed introduction of PLCs and standing and ad hoc committees (Instructional Leadership Team; Professional Development Committee; Mission and Vision Review Committee; Systems, Policies and Procedures Review Committee), a large number of Samad teachers will be needed and invited to play critical leadership roles at the school.

In the area of professional development for leadership, the principal can be a great source of information, influence, and support for teachers. As a role model, we recommend that the principal at Samad School create her own personal professional development plan and share it with teachers and staff. In itself, this act contributes to the realization of a collaborative school culture by building trust and demonstrating transparency with teachers.

Principals are responsible for creating and maintaining a positive school culture. Day et al. (2016) noted that because school culture, whether positive or negative, is a potent symbol influencing teaching and learning, a principal must model the behaviors they want to evoke in others. A principal’s leadership behaviors are noticed and interpreted by teachers as behaviors that should be incorporated into their own professional lives.
REFERENCES


Improving school culture to improve student achievement.

**Context**
- Economically diverse
- Large majority students are ELLs
- Most students live in poverty
- Racially and culturally diverse students
- Not an accredited school
- High staff turnover

**Conditions**
- Insufficient time to improve skills
- Lack of personal to support the administrator
- No external substitute
- Insufficient time in schedule for planning instruction and adult learning
- The school has no performance standards/SIP
- No focus on accomplishing school vision and mission
- Data not used to drive instruction
- Low family and community involvement
- Lack of resources
- Lack of funds

**Competencies**
- Minimal teacher knowledge on instructional strategies
- Minimal knowledge of teaching second language learners
- Insufficient administrator’s knowledge of how to support effective practices and provide meaningful feedback
- Not all teachers’ are certified in Illinois

**Culture**
- Low expectations for the Students
- Adults work in isolation
- Lack of trust amongst Stakeholders
- No focus on accomplishing School’s vision and Mission

**APPENDIX A**

4 C’s Analysis: AS IS

Improving school culture to improve student achievement.
APPENDIX B

4 C’s Analysis: TO BE

Context
- Economically diverse
- Large majority students are English learners
- Most students live in poverty
- Racially and culturally diverse students
- Obtain accreditation for the school
- Low staff turnover
- Higher scores on the standardized Assessments

Conditions
- Schedules allow for collaboration and adult learning time
- Sufficient staff to support the administrators and school operation
- Targeted and effective professional development
- Substitute teachers are available upon request
- The school has rigorous performance standards/strategic school improvement plan.
- Clear focus on accomplishing school’s vision and mission
- Data is used to drive instruction and learning
- High family and community involvement
- Sufficient resources and funds

Culture
- High expectations for student learning
- Adults collaborate on problem solving based on trust and respect
- All stakeholders trust each other
- All stakeholders share vision and mission
- Embrace accountability for all students’ learning
- Clear focus on promoting positive school culture

Competencies
- Teachers/administrators are knowledgeable of several effective instructional strategies
- Teachers/administrators are knowledgeable of the needs of second language learners
- Administrators are competent to support teachers in providing effective instructional strategies and provide meaningful feedback
- All teachers’ are certified to teach in Illinois

Improving school culture to improve students’ achievement
Once thought of as a soft approach to school improvement efforts, research has shown a healthy school culture is the foundation for a successful annual school improvement plan.

School culture consists of “the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors which characterize a school” (Phillips, 1996, p. 1). Or, simply put, “How we do things around here.” Every school has a culture, and every school can improve its culture.

To assess this important but often over-looked component of school improvement at our school, please take a few minutes to fill out the survey below.

**This is an anonymous survey with no names attached.**

Results will be tabulated and shared with staff at an end-of-the-school-year faculty meeting. Faculty will be invited to discuss the results to identify what’s working and what could be improved. Given this honest input from faculty, a school improvement committee might then develop and implement a targeted school improvement action plan for the next school year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Collaboration</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always or almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.</td>
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<td>2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.</td>
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<td>3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.</td>
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<td>4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.</td>
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<td>5. The planning/organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective</td>
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units/teams rather than as separate individuals.

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<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always - almost always</th>
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</thead>
</table>

**Collegial Relationships**

6. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school’s values.

7. Our school reflects a true “sense” of community.

8. Our schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.

9. Our school supports and appreciates sharing of new ideas by members of our school.

10. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.

**Efficacy or Self-Determination**

11. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.

12. School members are interdependent and value each other.

13. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.
14. Members of our school seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.

15. School staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.

16. People work here because they enjoy it and choose to be here.

Adapted from *School Culture Triage Survey* developed and refined by Phillips (1996), Phillips & Wagner (2002), and Wagner & Masden-Copas (2002).
APPENDIX D

School Culture Triage Survey: Small group Discussion Questions
(Revised 04/26/17)

Designate a discussion leader to keep the discussion focused and moving along, a time keeper to keep track of time, and a note-taker to record discussion findings. Discuss in turn the survey results in the three categories below. The note-taker or discussion leader will summarize the group’s findings with the larger group.

**Professional Collaboration**

1. What’s Surprising?
2. What’s Not Surprising?
3. Areas of Concern?
4. Why did we rate this way?
5. What are the obstacles preventing us from attaining higher rating in this section?

**Collegial Relationships**

1. What’s Surprising?
2. What’s Not Surprising?
3. Areas of Concern?
4. Why did we rate this way?
5. What are the obstacles preventing us from attaining a higher rating in this section?

**Efficacy or Self-Determination**

1. What’s Surprising?
2. What’s Not Surprising?
3. Areas of Concern?
4. Why did we rate this way?
5. What are the obstacles preventing us from attaining a higher rating in this section?
APPENDIX E

School Culture Triage Survey End-of-Year Workshop Exit Slip
(Revised 04/26/17)

What are your “takeaways” from the culture survey discussion today? Is there anything important you believe was left out?

What additional suggestions do you have to include in our school improvement action plan for the coming year (e.g., building procedures, internal & external communications, discipline, etc.)?

What are your hopes and fears going into the next school year?

Other (you may use the backside of this form if you need to):
### APPENDIX F

#### Strategies and Actions to Improve School Culture and Academic Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Action</th>
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| 1. Revisit and update the school’s mission and vision statements with all stakeholders collaboratively | • Principal invites and convenes an ad hoc representative group of stakeholders to participate in reviewing and updating the school’s mission and vision  
• School adopts a policy to revisit the school’s mission and vision every three years to meet changing needs and realities |
| 2. Enhance K-12 curriculum coherence and improve instructional practices | • Principal invites and convenes a K-12 representative group of teachers to serve on the Samad School Instructional Leadership Team (ILT).  
• The ILT identifies and seeks solutions for instructional deficits or organizational inefficiencies that may be negatively impacting student achievement  
• The ILT creates, supervises, and evaluates the success of a yearly School Improvement Plan (SIP)  
• The ILT meets regularly (biweekly or monthly) to plan and monitor academic initiatives in support of the school’s mission and vision; improve instructional practices; and progress toward SIP goals  
• As needed, the ILT invites teachers from grade-cluster or subject area Professional Learning Communities (PLCs, see Strategy Three) to collaboratively plan and monitor progress of initiatives to improve instruction and greater K-12 curriculum coherence through curriculum mapping  
• Teachers in PLCs meet monthly to:  
  > Create curriculum maps to ensure that the curriculum is aligned both vertically and horizontally  
  > Identify, share and try out best practice instructional strategies  
  > Identify and analyze data to inform instruction and lesson planning |
| 3. Review and update organizational systems, policies, and procedures to increase efficiency and enhance communication | • Principal invites and convenes an ad hoc committee of stakeholders (TBD) to review and update existing systems, policies, and procedures to address current personnel, regulatory, and fiscal realities  
• Committee identifies sources of summative and formative data to be used to assess K-12 grade level and/or subject area achievement and identify areas in need of instructional improvement |
| 4. Plan and enact professional development to grow and normalize a culture of professionalism among teachers and administrators | • To enhance communication, transparency and accountability, the committee creates a standard meeting protocol to be used school-wide for all meetings (e.g., Minutes are taken and submitted to the principal that include the purpose for the meeting, who attended, what was discussed, what was decided, next steps, who will do what, and when)

• To maximize the use of time and available teaching resources, working with the ILT, each year the committee reviews the daily and weekly in-school schedule for greater efficiencies

| Principal invites teachers and convenes a K-12 Professional Development Committee (PDC).
| The purpose of the PDC is to grow a culture of professionalism at Samad School. This is done through systematically planning professional development designed to continuously build instructional and leadership capacity within the school.

• The PDC surveys teachers annually to identify instructional and professional development needs

• Working with the ILT, the PDC plans professional development to support the school’s mission and vision; School Improvement Plan (SIP); and meet requirements for Common Core State Standards |