

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE

**AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY: EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF
SCHOOL CULTURE BY DISTRICT RESIDENTS AS MEASURED THROUGH
ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

A Doctoral Capstone Project

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Department of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the

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Doctor of Education

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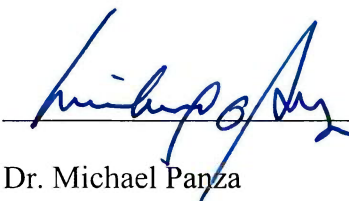
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my family: Michael, Jasper, Rowen, Mom and Dad. I never would have been able to do this if it wasn't for the five of you. Thank you for your help. Love you!

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I would like to thank my family who supported and encouraged me to pursue this degree:

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Abstract

School culture has a multitude of definitions and can be perceived differently by every stakeholder group. The value and measure of importance of school culture can vary drastically from building to building and district to district. The purpose of this action research study was to examine the perceptions of school culture as it relates to the Moniteau School District. Results indicated that school culture was perceived in a favorable light, with community members feeling the faculty and staff, as well as administration supported the student population. Additionally, the community provided suggestions for what can be done to improve school culture, if the opportunity would present itself. Implications of the study were that the district is on target with the extracurricular offerings and the communication methods it employs, which has led to a positive view of the current school culture. Feedback was offered on suggestions for improvements that could enhance school culture.

Keywords: school culture, district stakeholders, communication methods, administrative support, faculty and staff support, engagement

CHAPTER I

Introduction

School culture is a topic that Moniteau School District is seeking more data. The district has undergone many changes at the administrative level over the last seven years, most especially at the level of superintendent. During my tenure in the district (seven years) there have been two superintendents and two interim superintendents. With the constant upheaval in this position, there has been no consistency at the district level. New initiatives are started and then abandoned when someone new comes along. The focus of the district and goals within the comprehensive plan are written and reviewed, but not used to hold the district to any sort of standard.

COVID-19 also caused a break in any sort of consistency the district may have developed. With the shifting in and out of the brick and mortar setting, along with the state mandates on number of people permitted in the buildings and at events, family and community involvement dropped. Even now, people are using streaming platforms instead of attending school events, such as athletic matches.

Focusing on how the community views school culture will allow the district to make changes in order to meet the needs of the families and community members. Determining exactly what the district can do to encourage and support students, but to also create a welcoming environment for families, will be key in rebuilding that feeling of community within the district.

One major concern is how to draw people back into the schools and encourage them to become more involved in their child's education or in the education of their surrounding community members. Gathering data that shows the district what events are

popular and what the community at large is looking for will allow the district to host events and activities that appeal to all stakeholders. As the epicenter of the community, the school is the greatest draw for activities and events for families and district residents. Learning how to reach those stakeholders and providing them with the methods of involvement will help to establish that sense of school culture.

Background

Moniteau School District is a small, rural district comprised of approximately 1142 students (in the 2022-2023 school year) in grades K-12 and located about one hour north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There are two school buildings: Moniteau Junior-Senior High School (7-12) and Dassa McKinney Elementary School (K-6). The district employs roughly 170 staff members, which include, but are not limited to: administrators, directors, teachers, paraprofessionals, food service staff, custodial staff and maintenance staff. Extracurricular opportunities are offered at all levels (elementary, junior high, junior varsity and varsity) through both athletic endeavors and clubs. This action research study will utilize a quantitative approach to data collection. A survey will be offered to families of Moniteau students as well as district residents regarding the topics of school culture, engagement opportunities, and communication methods. All participants will be from within the bounds of the Moniteau School District.

A survey will be sent to all district families utilizing the district's Skylert system, which is the communication system for all district related information relayed through phone call, email, and/or text message. The Google Forms platform will be used to create and collect survey information. Google Sheets will be used to collate all survey results. In addition to Skylert, the survey can be accessed through the district website and Facebook

page which will target those residents who may not have a current student enrolled in the schools.

A survey participant disclosure form will be the first “question” of the survey. Participants who select the option that they understand the information presented in the disclosure form will then have the opportunity to move to the survey questions. Should the participant select no, the survey will immediately take them to the end of the survey thanking them for the time.

All participants in the study will be volunteers and may elect to stop participating at any time.

As the district superintendent, but also a parent of two students in the district, and an alumnus, this topic is something that has been mentioned by community stakeholders over the year and is designed to benefit the community-at-large. Additionally, reaching out to community members, drawing them back into the school system will support a goal within the district’s state required comprehensive plan. Achieving and/or maintaining a positive school culture will help to assist the district with better community involvement and a more positive atmosphere.

The district hopes to instill positive values in each and every student that passes through the doors. In order to achieve this goal, the students need to want to be here and are happy when they are here. Students who are happy in their school district are assumed to correlate to parents/guardians who are happy with their school district. Determining the current level of school culture and whether people are satisfied with the district is step one is assisting the district with a baseline of school culture. From there, the district can move forward in meeting the needs of the students and the community member.

Purpose of the Study

During the course of the pandemic, school culture has taken a significant hit. Due to the need for virtual learning, virtual meetings, and no in-person events, a disconnect has been formed between the school and the community. Unfortunately, students and parents alike have shared their displeasure with the district. The widespread divide between the reactions of the district and the expectations from the parents have created a chasm that is complex to understand and difficult to overcome. Stakeholders had opinions regarding masking, social distancing, quarantines, and other pandemic related issues, which were often in direct contrast to the district's stance, as provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and various other health agencies. Throughout the course of the 2021-2022 school year the district attempted to overcome some of these fractures, but the nature of COVID-19 prevented that from happening.

Students, parents, and teachers are all facing burnout at an alarming rate. Burnout can be viewed as feeling negative or stressed out in relation to a job. "Burnout is not a crisis of time, it is a crisis of the spirit" (Autry, 2001, p. 208). The burnout displays withdrawal from activities, not engaging with their peers or colleagues, anxiety and many other characteristics. District residents who would have been the first to volunteer for an event in the past are hesitant to do so at this time. Mental health needs have skyrocketed for students. Persons appear to be on edge and a contentious connection between all three groups has developed. A positive school culture will help to demonstrate how all district stakeholders being on the same page may help to provide a more well-rounded educational experience for students.

Learning can be fun for everyone. Reminding the district community how important it is to have a shared commitment to the students may help to foster and promote the district mission statement, which states: “Our mission is to prepare Moniteau students to achieve their fullest potential as they face the challenges of life” (Moniteau School District, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic was indeed a “challenge of life” and the district community faced the challenge in a multitude of ways. The district’s goal will be to reestablish a positive connection between all district stakeholders.

Research Questions

1. How do extracurricular opportunities factor into a district resident’s perception of school culture?
2. What prohibitive factors do district residents perceive as having an effect on school culture?
3. Does the delivery method of engagement opportunities have an impact on the district resident’s perception of school culture?
4. Do the district resident’s perception of school culture change from the beginning to the end of the school year?

Potential Outcomes

Several different outcomes may appear as a result of the study. The district will have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the impression of the community and how school culture is perceived. Additionally, methods of communication will be better understood in order for the district to utilize the most preferred method to communicate with the district’s stakeholders. Finally, engagement opportunities will be examined and reviewed as to how they are viewed under the umbrella of school culture.

The desire of the study will be to gather baseline information on how to interpret the current level of school culture and what is needed or necessary to improve upon that level. This will be measured by reviewing data on what events or activities are viewed as important as compared to those that are attended. Furthermore, the method in which stakeholders find out about the events within the district will be reviewed to determine what method best reaches the most people. The study will also learn the preferred method of communication for community members for future consideration.

Ideally, the district will be able to assume a standard of culture and build upon that measure. Understanding the current needs and wants of students and community members will allow the district to provide for its residents in a manner that portrays a sense of community and camaraderie. The focus will be on how everyone benefits when we all work together.

Financial Implications

Costs that may be associated with the study are unknown. At this time the information will be used as data review. However, should the data imply information that would assist the district in improving school culture costs may be associated with programming of that nature. That could include professional development opportunities, programming, additional staff members, and/or new engagement opportunities.

Summary

Once the data have been collected and analyzed, information will emerge that will show how the parent/resident groups perceives school culture, engagement opportunities, and communication methods. The data will assist the researcher in determining how the parents/residents feel and what they would like to see to enhance the engagement

opportunities, if any, and whether there can be a correlation between school culture and how parents/residents utilize occasions to become invested in the district. The researcher will then determine how to assess school culture by using the opportunities offered to stakeholders. The data will also show the most effective method of communicating with the stakeholders. Going farther, the study will analyze the differences between grade levels of students, gender, alumni status and whether social media was the preferred method of communication to all parties.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

School culture can be used as a measurement tool to determine how vested people are in their district. This study will utilize engagement opportunities as a measure of school culture through the view of district residents. Examining topics such as: student engagement, family engagement, communication styles, social media use and preference, types of engagement opportunities offered, alumni status, gender, staff engagement, administrator leadership styles, and culture through the lens of the school board will provide a more holistic picture of school culture at the Moniteau School District.

School Culture and Student Engagement

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in person learning ceased to exist and all extracurricular activities were canceled for schools across Pennsylvania. This was true for the Moniteau School District. Students and families remained at home and continued their educational experience in a virtual setting, practically eliminating engagement opportunities in a face-to-face manner. This had a significant impact on school culture. Examining school culture through the lens of multiple stakeholders provides insight into the expectations of the district. Student and family engagement and social media use provide an opportunity to understand how school culture is interpreted. “Adolescents with greater perceived belonging and interpersonal support also develop productive and proactive behaviors that result in positive developmental outcomes” (Del Toro & Wang, 2021). It is in the best interests of schools to develop students’ sense of belonging as it contributes to the overall sense of community and school culture (Riekie et al., 2017).

History of School Culture

“Education begins in the family and continues in kindergarten and later in school...” (Stanescu, 2021). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were thrust into unfamiliar territory, forever changing the learning environment for a generation of students. School culture, as it was known, took a drastic turn in direction and education became a hot topic all over the world. School culture can be viewed as: “...the invisible dimension of school life, which is the result of the overall relationships of all its employees and students, and each of them experiences subjectively, at the level of one’s own emotions, social relations and work environment” (Pinkas & Bulic, 2017).

The climate of a district can have an effect, whether it be positive or negative, on the engagement of its stakeholders. Petlak (2014) writes that:

Culture describes how things are and acts as a screen or lens through which the world is viewed. Each school has a different reality or mindset of school life. A school’s culture is shaped by its history, context and the people in it. (p. 228)

The importance of this statement is to understand that culture can and will vary from district to district but also from school to school within a district or school building.

Culture can be assessed from the viewpoint of district stakeholders in a multitude of ways. Teachers and students may have a differing opinion than parents or community members. Overall, culture can have a positive or negative effect on shaping the school or district makeup (Petlak, 2014). In addition to schools and districts, individual classrooms can have a significant impact on the makeup of the culture of a district. Schools are the hub of the community, and as such, are the foundation for educational effectiveness once a culture has been established (Morris et al., 2012). “Schools are primary agents of

socialization; after one's own family, the school is often the first place a child learns society's norms, values, and culture and comes to understand his or her roles and responsibilities in society" (Peguero & Bracy, 2014).

Giving students opportunities to participate in important activities at school helps to create a feeling of personal investment in their school. This increased investment results in greater bonding and adoption of the school's standard of behavior, reducing the likelihood that the students will become involved in problem behaviors (Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021).

Evidence strongly suggests that a positive school culture can have a significant positive impact on the health and welfare of a student in addition to the beneficial effects on student behaviors and academics (Jessiman et al., 2022).

Students are essential to the culture of a school and this can be examined by their engagement in the school itself. Student engagement promotes family engagement (Lam et al., 2016). Family engagement drives tradition and history within the school and allows for rich opportunities to occur. Three main categories affect student engagement, which include: "...teachers, peers and parents" (Lam et al., 2016, p. 139). These three groups impact what the student chooses to do when involved in the school, "...in an intricate web of mutually influencing systems" (Lam, 2016, p. 149). Students who felt more connected to the system overall, felt better about themselves as students and members of the school community (Riekke et al., 2017). When students perceive that their school is a caring, compassionate place, their sense of belonging becomes stronger and they develop

better, more prosocial relationships with all stakeholders. (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2007).

School climate is the factor that shapes the student's formative years (Peguero & Bracy, 2014). The culture of the school can lead to a plethora of items that have a lasting impact on their time in school and also on their time upon completion of their school years. A negative climate can compromise the educational setting and cause students to become high school dropouts. It can also have an influence on criminal behavior, unemployment and general health (Peguero & Bracy, 2014). On the opposite end of the spectrum, Peguero and Bracy (2014) found that a positive climate encourages school completion and may reduce or prevent fewer promising behaviors (e.g. incarceration, drug use, delinquency).

Communication and Social Media

Schools have long used a variety of communication tools to foster engagement with families and provide information. Methods used have included: emails, phone calls, text messages, newsletters (both digital and print versions), letters, calendars, websites and mass mailings. With the rise in social media users, it only makes sense that schools jump on the social media train as well (Jedrzejczyk & Brzezinski, 2021). Studies have shown that, "The use of social media by organizations increases customer involvement in the processes that take place..." (Jedrzejczyk & Brzezinski, 2021, p. 460). Schools are consistently looking at family engagement opportunities, especially Title I schools. Utilizing social media platforms as a method to push information out to families in a quick and easy manner is one form of engagement being reviewed by districts. "A

leading factor in the digital transformation of educational institutions has undoubtedly been the vision of its leaders” (Karakose et al., 2021).

During the pandemic schools were looking for a number of methods to reach families at their level. Social media was at the forefront of that communication (Jedrzejczyk & Brzezinski, 2021). For some that included phone calls, google meets or email, but for others messaging on apps became the norm.

Social media allows schools to provide instant updates, rapid distribution, and immediate response from school stakeholders. Well used social media can also significantly enrich the learning process by increasing the attractiveness of the learning content and the variety of teaching tools (Jedrzejczyk & Brzezinski, 2021, p. 461)

Social media networks provided the illusion that “everyone is within reach” (Al-Hamad et al., 2022, p. 90). Students and parents were comfortable with the platforms and more apt to use them due to their “entertaining and friendlier” nature (Al-Hamad et al., 2022, p. 90). Teachers utilized social media to inform students of class assignments, provide feedback, make general comments, and speak with a group of students at any given time. The premise was that social media is a quick, easy-to-use platform to convey information. However, the use of social media within the educational setting is driven by how much the students buy-in to its value (Al-Hamad et al., 2022).

Social media is more mainstream now than ever before. Parents utilize social media in their daily lives, “...because they perceive value in the activity and it empowers them in at least some aspects of their lives” (Dennen et al., 2021, p. 12). Parents have a slew of responsibilities assigned to them and for some it is essential to gather information

as quickly as possible in order to move on to their next task. Henstrom et al. (2022) found that social media is the quickest avenue for parents to turn to gather the necessary information for whatever topic in which they are interested. Henstrom et al.'s (2022) study utilized the examination of Facebook and the effect it had on the dissemination of information. Research concluded that parents employed Facebook at least one time per day and information was made readily available on that social media platform as a result (Henstrom et al., 2022).

“Twenty-first century parents have a powerful tool at their fingertips 24 hours a day: the Internet...it is a space where two-way communication can occur and relationships can be fostered” (Dennen et al., 2021, p. 12). Technology has provided the opportunity for schools to communicate on a multitude of platforms. Social media use, to project information, rose 67% in a period of 16 years (Dei et al., 2022). This trend has had an impact on how information is shared and when the sharing can occur. “Social media has been used to market to parents, and parents who are social media influencers have turned their social media posting into revenue streams for their families” (Dennen et al., 2021, p. 2). Ricks et al. (2021, p. 609) found that the use of social media can help “build engagement in one’s community.” More opportunities are available when people have a large social network and use it to find resources for whatever they may need at that moment.

However, social media can also be viewed through a negative lens. Frolova et al., (2019) have found that the increasingly violent messages portrayed through the media have a lasting effect on the students psyche. Kazaz et al. (2022) found that oftentimes students were anticipating learning one thing, but were given violent messages instead

which was built into the program platform they were using to learn. Over stimulating students with these negative messages can appear to influence their overall makeup as a student, which examines items such as behavior, attendance and grades (Frolova et al., 2019). Jayabharathi et al. (2022), found that boys spent significantly more time on social media and used it primarily for discussions and relationship building, while girls used the platforms to discuss personal issues.

Family Engagement

Family engagement practices have shifted from the early years of education. Early childhood programs were considered essential for students to succeed later in life. Providing access to community sponsored programs were considered a leg-up for families and promoted family engagement in the educational process during the pre-school years. Not only did this get parents involved in their child's life early on, it became an expectation so that when they reached elementary school there was no pressure to assume all of these additional responsibilities because they were already built in to their daily lives (Underwood & Killoran, 2012). The original expectation for education was that families would support schools and assimilate with the teachings, lessons, and curriculum. However, the new expectation is that families and school work in tandem to enhance the educational experience for students (Wyness, 2020). Wyness (2020) examined the difference between parental engagement and parental involvement and the benefits they can have on both the student and the school environment. "Kindness is a central value and ongoing dialog across a network of engagement is crucial" (Wyness, 2020, p. 174).

Borup et al. (2019, p. 81) found “three primary factors that contribute to parental engagement behaviors: parents’ motivational beliefs; the types of invitations parents receive from their student and others; and, parents’ perceived ability, availability, and energy to help.” Families and schools should have a mutually beneficial relationship that affords students multiple opportunities both at home and at school. Family engagement has demonstrated that outcomes of students, staff and parents all increased when families were more engaged in their student’s education (Gross et al., 2018).

Thamrin et al. (2021) found that certain barriers, such as economic stressors, unemployment, work hours, and mental health concerns can make it difficult to have parental engagement. Furthermore, families with these barriers needed “...intensive recruitment efforts to successfully engage them” (Thamrin et al., 2021, p. 888). While these families may want to engage with their child or school, there may be, what they perceive to be, too many preventative measures barring them from becoming more engaged with the school system.

Family engagement has the ability to drive student engagement and parent perception on school culture and is as important as their perception on social media use (Procentese et al., 2019). Family units perceive the growing use of information technology in a plethora of ways. However, “...it is evident that the information and communication technologies are profoundly changing the ways in which people behave and relate to each other” (Procentese et al., 2019, p. 2). Using social media is one avenue families are able to effectively communicate and stay in touch throughout the day. Having parents proficient in the use of social media affords less opportunities for students to entertain the use of these platforms for more nefarious reasons and keeps families

abreast of the day-to-day interactions. Procentese et al. (2019) found that parents who perceive social media platforms as a positive investment of their time have better relationships amongst family members and are open to new experiences. Dredge and Schreurs (2020, p. 895) found that "...the most consistent findings regarding interpersonal benefits associated with social media use...were sense of belonging, social capital, and offline social interaction."

Borup et al. (2015) found that students who received encouragement from their families during their online learning did significantly better than those students who did not receive familial support. Another significant finding was that students who had established trusting relationships with their families had families who were more engaged in the school. "Parents also modeled the importance of education by volunteering at school functions" (Borup et al., 2015, p. 81). Modeling expected behaviors demonstrates to students that their parents care about not only their academic accomplishments, but also their extracurricular involvement as well.

Supporting parents as leaders within their child's education is important in keeping families engaged in the educational setting (Douglass et al., 2019). Not only do parents act as advocates for their children, they also have more positive relationships with school staff (Douglass et al., 2019). Leadership at this level led to more community involvement for all stakeholders involved and a more well-rounded understanding of family dynamics and school expectations (Douglass et al., 2019). Utilizing a distributed leadership style predicted how much support parents feel they have from the school (Gross et al., 2018). Furthermore, the multi-tiered system of support also demonstrated

that a parent felt their child was receiving necessary support and in turn they felt supported in their role (Gross et al., 2018).

Parental involvement provides the opportunity for schools to understand their students better in order to provide supports accordingly. Communication between home and school strengthens the involvement levels and shows a connection between home life and school life (Caridade et al., 2020). Parents who prove to be more involved in their child's educational setting are witness to fewer behavioral problems and are more supportive of participation in extracurricular activities, while the opposite can be said of parents who show little or no involvement (Caridade et al., 2020). Parental involvement can assist in establishing a more positive school culture and when school culture improves, students become more involved, absenteeism declines and behavior problems are reduced because families and schools are working collaboratively (Caridade et al., 2020).

Student Engagement

Student engagement varies amongst gender and grade level. Students in younger grades tend to remain more engaged within the school. Their families also tend to be more engaged in the school with this engagement decreasing the older the student becomes (Borup et al., 2015). Additionally, females are traditionally more involved in their schools than their male counterparts. Students who benefited from a strong parental support system also displayed higher levels of engagement (Lam et al., 2016). Peer support is also important when determining engagement levels of students. The more support and friendships a student has, the more engaged that student feels in school. Furthermore, those students who received familial support and/or who were from higher

socio-economic backgrounds did better in school and were also more engaged with their peers and academics in general (Haapasalo et al., 2010). Interactions between students that occur inside the classroom as well as outside the classroom afford the opportunity for students to develop a stronger connection to their peers (Riekie et al., 2017).

However, one study found that adolescence is the period of time that defines how students become engaged in school activities due to more differentiated gender disparities. At this point in their development, athleticism has been established and students are no longer participating in athletic endeavors for fun, but are starting to enjoy competition. This means that there may be tryouts for teams and students could be excluded from participation. With the reduction in the need to participate because their friends do, the team makeup undergoes a change in dynamic. For example, girls and boys tend to lean more toward “gender-appropriate” activities, or girls will withdraw from sports completely during adolescence (MacQuarrie et al. 2008, p. 263). MacQuarrie et al., (2008) also remarked on the beneficial nature of students taking part in establishing the activities that are offered and how that can have an impact on the participation rates, but that having a variety of activities helps to keep students involved and participating. “One outcome of athletic elitism is that it privileges some students and activities over others, and this does not create a culture of inclusion...it can create rifts in school cohesion and entrenches privilege along gender lines” (MacQuarrie et al., 2008, p. 269).

Cemalcilar (2010) also found the importance on peer relationships and a student’s sense of belonging. Students who had strong relationships, and could list a friend or a peer group, were more engaged in school than their peers who may have been ostracized or who have no friends. Not only did this make them less engaged in the overall school

environment, these students were more likely to develop behavior issues, academic struggles and become high school dropouts. A student's socio-economic status could also contribute to a sense of well-being amongst their peers. Moore et al. (2017) found that students from more affluent families were more invested in their school and had positive relationships with both peers and their teachers. Unfortunately, students in the same schools who came from a lower socio-economic status had exactly the opposite experience. These students felt unappreciated and undervalued in their school community (Moore et al., 2017).

When examining bullying as it relates to school climate, Konishi et al. (2021) found that students who experienced a greater connection to the school: more involvement in the school, sense of belonging, feeling of safety and security, had a stronger reaction to the occurrence of bullying and were more likely to stop it or report it to an adult. Additionally, students had a greater connection to their peers and felt more accepted in a diverse culture, which in turn assisted in preventing bullying from occurring (Konishi et al., 2021). Thus, when school culture is viewed as positive and students feel accepted for who they are, they are more willing to participate in more school offerings and help their peers in the event of a negative interaction (i.e. bullying). These students were found to be less tolerant of non-acceptance and more likely to engage in pro-social endeavors (Konishi et al., 2021). Frostick et al. (2018, p. 335) found that: "...school connectedness had a positive mediating effect on mental health."

Rezende et al. (2015, p. 1) found that "School level characteristics have important potential to increase the possibility of engagement in physical activity in and out of school, and therefore have a fundamental role in promoting these practices." Barriers do

exist to physical activity and, because of that, students are unable to participate in extracurricular opportunities. Such barriers can include non-availability of extracurricular offerings or non-accessibility for these offerings (Rezende et al., 2015). This study also concluded that half of the students who participated in physical activity, both in and outside of school, were male with strong supportive family relationships who promoted these activities. The type of extracurricular activity can have an impact on student engagement and how students perceive themselves in the school environment (Pjanic et al., 2021).

Students who feel a strong sense of belonging in their school environment have been found to be:

...less anxious, less lonely, more autonomous and pro-social, more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated and more successful in their classes. Furthermore, they value education more, participate in both in-class and out-of-class activities more frequently, have higher self-esteem, higher school attendance rates, better relationships with their teachers and peers, and are in general more satisfied with their lives (Cemalcilar, 2010, p. 247).

These feelings are especially evident in elementary aged students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Cemalcilar, 2010). The younger the student when the encouragement begins to participate in extracurriculars leads to a greater rate of participation when the student is older, when students traditionally begin retreating from sports or other extracurricular activities (Aoyagi et al., 2020).

Student Engagement in Extracurricular Activities

The school setting also played a role in the sense of belonging. Schools who offered extracurriculars, afforded a safe environment to learn and grow, and provided students with multiple academic opportunities provided a stronger sense of belonging than those who fostered unsafe learning environments, no availability for afterschool or extracurricular programming or other lack of resources (Aoyagi et al., 2010). Students who participated on a team were affected by their teammates in the strength of their motivation (Aoyagi et al., 2020). Conversely, students who were considered victims of bullying perceived their school environment negatively and did not trust their teachers to keep them safe in the learning environment (Rudasill et al., 2018).

Students who are involved on a team seem to associate that team with positive peer relationships, both with team members and non-team members (Gorski, 2021). Because of the established positive relationships within the team, a stronger connection to the school is developed and a connection felt to the staff is recognized. Haapasalo et al. (2010) also found that students who participate in extracurriculars do better in school but also feel more engaged and connected to their teachers, if their teachers provide high expectations in a structured environment. Barr and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2007) studied two schools who had a requirement for students to participate in other non-academic activities. These opportunities provided students with the ability to gain perspective on their school from a different viewpoint and become involved in decision-making leading to local change and a sense of connectedness (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2007).

“Extracurricular activities expose students to learning opportunities different from their classroom learning environments, potentially shifting their levels of school engagement” (Gorski, 2021). These activities, while not being the sole focus of

schooling, are important to the overall educational process and can assist students in attaining academic success. Gorski (2021) found that there are three forms of engagement that are interconnected in the educational process: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Each engagement type helps students develop a sense of belonging in some form to the school and the individuals associated with it. Yet, a student's background can have an effect on how engaged they become in their school. Ferrari et al. (2021) found a connection to the number of available sports courts, fields, etc...with the number of students who participate in extracurricular offerings: the more courts, the higher the number of students. Additionally, Ferrari et al., (2021) concluded that the school environment significantly impacts whether students elect to participate in extracurricular activities.

Extracurricular coaches or leaders play a key role in student participation and inclusion. Studies show that coaches who are from within the school setting promote and foster stronger relationships with students and build better programs than those who are from outside the organization (McCabe et al., 2020). Because the extracurricular programs are in addition to the academic program students tend to do better in both areas and develop more of a sense of belonging to the overall school system. Talented youth, such as those who would be considered gifted, felt that their success, or lack thereof, could be attributed to their school environment (Gierczyk & Pfeiffer, 2021). In addition to the school environment, relationships with one's peers influenced feelings about inclusiveness and the "development of students' abilities" (Gierczyk & Pfeiffer, 2021, p. 582).

The way an extracurricular program is developed determines the amount of participation the program receives (McCabe et al., 2020). A study in Japan determined that physically active students, both inside and outside school hours, determined the level of childhood obesity as well as participation rates in extracurriculars and school dropout rates. The study also found that these particular teachers spend an average of three to four times longer with students per week than their non-involved colleagues (Aoyagi et al., 2020).

Title IX and Extracurricular Opportunities.

Title IX had a major impact on the effect of women in the work force and eventually transitioned to encompass females in the educational setting. Sexual harassment occurs across all levels of education and students have the expectation of safety while in school or participating in a school activity. Social media has enhanced the stories of sexual assault survivors and provided a forum for students to recount their experiences and to ensure steps are being taken to prevent the same issues from continuing to happen (Suran, 2015). With the addition of the internet, Title IX is exposed more than ever before and demonstrates the importance of knowing and understanding the law regarding sexual harassment. Additionally, social media has given a voice to the victims and removed the stigma of sexual assault by laying the blame where it should be (Suran, 2015). “Title IX is supposed to ensure that people are safe and comfortable to pursue their educational opportunities regardless of gender, but gender inequity runs deeper than the law can reach” (Suran, 2015, p. 308).

Students became so used to facing sexism day-to-day at school they were unable to see that it was happening to them at exponentially higher rates than the rest of the

surrounding areas. Sexism became such a problem in their school that the girls involved in a service-learning project described it as follows: "...sexism was not a problem in the world today, despite the high levels of sexual harassment they faced in school" (Martin & Beese, 2016, p. 228). These girls were unaware that sexism was a problem they were facing in their school and in the country because it was embedded in their normal, daily lives. During Martin and Beese's (2016) study, the authors found that culture can change when girls learn to stand up to sexual harassment.

When Title IX was first introduced, all cases were between students and teachers or other school officials (Cyphert, 2017). The Davis decision effectively shifted the focus and propelled the court system to allow for peer-on-peer sexual harassment rulings within the school setting (Cyphert, 2017). As such, the Davis decision put into place the decree that every school district have a grievance procedure to report sexual harassment. Peer-on-peer sexual harassment within the school environment is overseen by the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

Title IX also focuses on the disparity between men's and women's athletics and has brought about reform targeting equitable opportunities for all genders. High schools are now required to file an Interscholastic Athletic Opportunities Disclosure Form every year which highlights the number of sports offered to both males and females, the financial amount spent on each athletic team (and student) and the number of students who participate at the start and end of each sports season.

School Culture and School Staff

Student relationships with school staff can be viewed in both a positive and negative manner. However, students who tend to view these relationships in a more

positive light do so because of their meaningful interactions with those in the school setting, leading to positive relationships (Reid & Smith, 2018). While relationships with the school principal can have a lasting effect of the sense of belonging, teachers are the first to establish a relationship with students and have a significant impact on the establishment of school culture and its applicability to the sense of belonging for any student.

More positive relationships with teachers promoted a greater sense of belonging which can contribute to stronger academic achievement (Cemalcilar, 2010). “The presence of supporting, caring, and stimulating relationships in the school also comes with a stimulating and safe environment, and together they enhance students’ schooling experiences” (Cemalcilar, 2010, p. 261). When students perceived their relationship with teachers to be more positive the climate was generally more positive and was viewed as a preventative measure for negativity (Peguero & Bracy, 2014). Conversely, negative interactions between teachers and students can lead to a breakdown in culture (Frolova et al., 2019). In a study by Frolova et al. (2019), the researchers found that the breakdown in student and staff relations occurred as a result of negative performance on standardized tests. The teachers found this to contribute to the student’s overall lack of motivation.

Teacher leaders are becoming more common in today’s school system and they share more of the responsibility in the development of school culture (Simpson, 2021). Leadership by teachers can be expressed in their relationships with other staff members and students. Teachers can have the ultimate impact on school culture as they can have a significant impact on the attitude and performance of their colleagues and their students. When examining teacher leadership, Simpson (2021) found that teacher leaders were

most supported in an atmosphere of collaboration where teachers feel valued and understood. Because these teachers work directly on the front lines they often have good ideas of what needs to occur to make the students, school, or district more successful and more valued (Simpson, 2021). “If the change is anticipated, perceived as necessary and welcomed by educators, it can be uplifting and energizing. In contrast, unwelcome change can be disturbing and disorienting” (Kovacevic et al., 2018).

School administrators have the ability to influence school culture: both positively and negatively (Harris, 2018). Because students spend a significant portion of their waking hours with those outside of their family unit, the influence they are under at school can assist in the development of school culture (Del Toro & Wang, 2021). Administrators are able to foster a nurturing environment where students feel safe to learn and develop. “...positive school-based interpersonal relationships and students’ trust in school authority’s engagement in fair discipline practices – both of which are major components of school climate – have been found to predict greater engagement in school” (Del Toro & Wang, 2021). Culture is achieved through active listening and determining the views of the school by understanding what is being said (Harris, 2018).

In as much as school leaders are expected to drive their organization toward achieving set goals related to academic achievement, they are equally expected to ensure that the teaching and learning environment adheres with the tenets of optimism and harmony. (Velarde et al., 2022, p. 164)

“Good leaders are never satisfied with what is. They see what could be, and they continually seek to achieve it” (Maxwell, 2018, p. 130). Reavis et al. (1999) found how a principal can completely overhaul a school’s academic program by relating to both

students and staff and connect with them in areas other than academics. By doing this students and staff members felt more valued and the school saw a significant improvement in test scores from one year to the next. Teachers and students were active in planning activities for involvement and a more diplomatic approach was used in the planning in order to ensure everyone's voice was heard and viewpoints were considered. Strict rules were enforced for all students and high expectations were the norm, which resulted in teachers and students adapting to the new procedures with minimal fussing, but still feeling supported by school staff and administration (Reavis, et al. 1999). The principal, "...had high energy, was very competitive, was goal focused and positive, gave credit to others for successes that might have been due largely to his efforts, praised lavishly, was attentive to detail, and followed up on everything" (Reavis, et al., 1999, p. 201). Cemalcilar (2010) also found that how administrators interact with their students can have a strong correlation to the students' sense of belonging.

Chen and Yang (2022) found that leadership within higher education can have a profound effect on the culture of a university. Leaders in these settings must respond to the changing environment, but must also address these changes within the setting. Students who do not feel supported by the top-level leaders feel no sense of belonging to the school and ultimately lack a positive school climate which creates a lack of respect and supportive environment (Chen & Yang, 2022).

The school environment does not solely focus on academics any longer. School administrators have been tasked with ensuring a safe and secure learning environment while also focusing on health, community partnerships, academics and school culture. All elements of the learning process, both inside and outside the school walls, are

emphasized in the school environment (Obied, 2020). A safe and secure environment encourages more involvement in the school, whether that may be in improving academic programs, parental involvement, or extracurricular participation (Obied, 2020). “Effective school leadership presents a viable prospect in promoting a healthy school climate characterized by a goal-driven, harmonious teaching and learning environment” (Velarde et al., 2022).

Administrative Leadership Styles

“Regardless of structure, of environment, or of leadership style, our organizations remain fundamentally human organizations, which means they will reflect both the strengths and the frailties of the human condition” (Autry, 2001, p. 100). Even the best leadership styles will have flaws. According to Velarde et al. (2022, p. 179), “...leaders with a high level of cultural intelligence can positively influence organization behaviors.” School leaders utilize a variety of leadership styles to develop and advance a school’s mission and vision statement. Those statements can include areas on academic achievement, extracurricular participation and school climate goals. Determining a school’s ethos is also an important step in understanding the makeup of the inner-workings of the school, its students, and the staff members (Bragg & Manchester, 2016).

Transformational leadership promotes changes within the system and the individuals (Pinkas & Bulic, 2017). This leadership style allows shifts in culture to occur from within the organization through the use of support and encouragement.

Transactional leadership is another leadership style used to achieve culture changes.

Transactional leadership uses the philosophy of give and take between the leader and the

followers. These two forms of leadership can work in tandem to promote culture shifts that benefit both staff and students (Pinkas & Bulic, 2017).

Transformational leadership is attributed as necessary in a principal's repertoire in order to effect change at the building level (Tan et al., 2022). The tenets of transformational leadership provides the necessary qualities a leader must have when working on their "school improvement journey" (Tan et al., 2022, p. 485). A transformational leader takes a staff member who has only been concerned with their own well-being and encourages them to look at the broader picture in terms of the educational setting. These leaders demonstrate the importance of the district's mission and vision and how those can be accomplished, for the benefit of the student, rather than focusing on the individual vision of one person (Tan et al., 2022). Transformational leaders look at the greater good within the system and they are viewed as an inspirational motivator (Araya, 2022). Araya (2022) found employees responded more favorably to transformational leadership. Maxwell (2018) stated:

All leaders have one thing in common. They see more and before others. What makes that indispensable is that it allows their followers to begin expanding their vision and acting on it more quickly. If the leader doesn't see the vision, the people never will. (p. 166)

It is up to the transformational leader to make people believe in something and striving for better.

Transactional leadership is another style employed to motivate workers. In this method, rewards are used to encourage people to employ good behavior or to perform to the expected scale (Araya, 2022). Transactional leadership is extrinsically motivated.

Araya (2022) found that while people do respond to transactional leadership it is not the most preferred leadership style if a systemic change is desired. When looking at transactional leadership through the lens of school culture, a staff member may only contribute to changing the climate if they themselves will reap the benefits or rewards. When they are unable to view a change in this manner individuals may be more apt to ignore or challenge this change in the system.

Passive or avoidant leadership takes a more hands-off approach. Leaders let all decision-making occur at the local level and not the administrative level (Alhuzaim et al., 2022). Essentially, the control of the school would be in the hands of those decision makers, such as the teachers, the students, or the parents. These administrators avoid decision-making and tend to not want to rock the boat (Alhuzaim et al., 2022). Change occurring would be difficult in this leadership style due to inconsistent messaging and differing foci with no emphasis on the mission of the school or district.

Servant leadership can be attributed to organizational performance. Servant leaders build upon the philosophy that anyone can be a leader (Bier, 2021). The main tenets of a servant leader are: character, integrity, humility, courage, empowerment, empathy, emphasis on the greater good, and consistently electing to put others first (Bier, 2021). “Principals have a powerful, but indirect impact on student achievement and well-being as it is mediated through the principal’s influence on teachers and school climate” (Bier, 2021, p. 30). Servant leaders do not use force to gain a following, but instead emphasize the importance of individualism and focus on how students and staff can work to have an influence on their own situation in a positive respect. People who choose to

work in the field of education traditionally select this job because of “moral reasons” (Bier, 2021, p. 30).

“As a servant leader of a school the principal’s role requires more than knowing and reflecting on their individual purpose. They must also facilitate a sense of purpose among all those in the school community” (Bier, 2021, p. 33). Making connections between students, staff and the community are essential to a servant leader. It is with these connections a sense of culture can be built and enjoyed throughout the district. A principal is a key component of establishing this culture and contributing to its success. Autry (2001, p. 53) states that “In order to bring the concepts of servant leadership to your people, you must prepare them, educate them, train them.” Additionally, servant leaders should be a shoulder to lean on or an ear to listen. They take a more supportive role (Autry, 2001).

Moral leaders are shaped by attitudes and values and how they contribute to the overall vision (Sergiovanni, 1992). When specifically referencing school leadership, “...key qualities...are an understanding of how children and adults learn and keep on learning and the ability to build communities of learners” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 1). Moral leaders are more authentic in their approach to leadership as it is shaped by the core values viewed as important to them. “Professionalism as virtue is also concerned with questions of character” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 55).

Authoritarian management has led to negative interactions amongst students and staff members (Frolova et al., 2019). Authoritarian leaders have effectively removed the opportunity for individualism to occur, which can lead to resentment and hostility. When this occurs, teachers have indicated they are not satisfied with their position which in turn

leads to students not being happy in their school setting (Frolova et al., 2019). “A direct relationship between the support of an authoritarian style in school and the estimates of conflict between the administration and teacher” was found (Frolova et al., 2019). When teachers are stressed in their position this can carry over to their interactions with students and parents.

Parents interpret negative interactions as a hostile environment and a significant lack of trust is then established (Frolova et al., 2019). When this occurs, no one wins. The school culture is poor because a lack of community has been established when finger pointing occurs and the blame is placed on whomever the negative interaction occurred. This leadership style, especially in the field of education, creates a lose-lose scenario between all stakeholders.

Digital leadership is a leadership style that connects K-12 administrators with technology (Ellis et al., 2021). This new leadership style “encompasses using the vast reach of technology to improve lives, well-being, and circumstances of others” (Ellis et al., 2021, p. 697). Digital leadership blends a district’s mission and vision with relationships and interactions relating to technology. The entire premise was devised to focus on the advancements in technology and how they are incorporated into the school and/or district. Today’s school administrators are faced with integrating technology into the school system, while ensuring that professional development opportunities are sufficient to enhance digital platforms (Ellis et al., 2021).

When examining school culture resulting from principals as digital leaders, 93% of the principals stated that while they were aware of digital leadership and importance for improving teaching and learning outcomes for the digital age, they

experienced limited opportunities to implement digital leadership in their school (Ellis et al., 2021, p. 698).

School Culture and the School Board

School board members were originally established to be the conduit between the community at-large and the district and vice-versa (Roegman et al., 2022). School board members are also a key component in establishing school culture. High achieving schools are a product of school boards and school leaders working together to set high expectations for their students (Ford & Ihkre, 2015). Providing transparency in school achievement and financial matters begins a dialog between school board members and other community members in order to hold the appropriate individuals accountable for the success or lack thereof of the students, schools, or a district (Ford & Ihkre, 2015). School culture can change when parents are unhappy with the current trend in their district and vote school board members out. An overturn in board members can also mean a new superintendent and new expectations for all stakeholders. Ford and Ihkre (2015) found that districts who performed better typically had a cohesive board unit who agreed on the definition of accountability of themselves, the administrators, and the teaching staff.

The pandemic has shifted school board meetings into public forums for political conversations and debates as opposed to handling traditional topics (personnel, curriculum, financial matters (Roegman et al., 2022). School board members must now navigate differing opinions and worry more about the social and emotional status of students on top of their academic endeavors (Roegman et al., 2022). “Differing opinions about the purposes of education have always and will continue to exist. The key is to

ensure that school boards are equipped to balance competing values as they work to ensure all students have equitable educational experiences” (Roegman et al., 2022, p. 49).

The Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA) has principles for governance and leadership, which are as follows:

- lead responsibly
- act ethically
- plan thoughtfully
- evaluate continuously
- communicate clearly
- advocate earnestly
- govern effectively (Pennsylvania School Board Association, 2022, para. 2)

Using the above-listed principles, school boards are able to keep the focus on the students and not on personal agendas. Each principle has short and long-term effects on a decision, and ultimately the education of every student. (Pennsylvania School Board Association, 2022). School directors are required to undergo a predetermined training with a specific number of hours. The trainings emphasize the principles and the rationale behind the board’s purpose. In addition to training, school directors have access to articles and daily emails with up-to-date information occurring in schools in the state of Pennsylvania. Current and former law cases are also available for review.

Moniteau School District

Moniteau School District is a small, rural district comprised of approximately 1280 students in grades K-12 (during the 2021-2022 school year) and located about one hour north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There are two school buildings in the district:

Dassa McKinney Elementary School (K-6) and Moniteau Junior-Senior High School (7-12). The district covers a geographical area of 157 square miles. Within those borders are the townships of Cherry, Clay, Concord, Marion, Venango and Washington with the boroughs of Cherry Valley, Eau Claire, and West Sunbury.

Approximately 20% of the student population is identified as special education. The district has shown a significant decrease in enrollment over the last two years with the largest grade (6th) having 103 students and the smallest grade (kindergarten) with only 71 students enrolled. Forty-eight percent of the student population is female. Approximately 170 staff members are employed by the district (administrators, directors, teachers, paraprofessionals, food service staff, custodial staff, and maintenance staff). Furthermore, roughly 50% of the students qualify for the free/reduced lunch option.

Extracurricular opportunities are offered at both buildings, however athletic offerings at the elementary level are organized by the community, not the school. Junior varsity and varsity teams consist of students in grades 9-12, while students in grades 7-8 make up the junior high teams. The following athletic opportunities are offered at the Junior-Senior High School:

- football (primarily boys, junior high, junior varsity and varsity);
- cross country (boys and girls, junior high and varsity);
- volleyball (primarily girls junior high, junior varsity, and varsity);
- golf (boys and girls varsity);
- basketball (boys and girls, junior high, junior varsity and varsity);
- competitive spirit (primarily girls junior high and varsity);
- baseball (boys junior high, junior varsity and varsity);

- softball (girls junior high, junior varsity and varsity);
- track and field (boys and girls, junior high and varsity);
- sideline cheer (junior high, junior varsity and varsity);

During the 2021-2022 school year the following number of athletes participated in each sport:

- boys track – 26
- girls track – 30
- baseball – 15
- softball – 19
- junior high volleyball – 23
- junior high boys' basketball – 15
- junior high girls' basketball – 12
- football – 27
- junior high football – 23
- volleyball – 22
- boys' cross country – 6
- girls' cross country – 7
- junior high girls' cross country – 6
- girls golf – 10
- boys golf – 10
- junior high competitive spirit – 13
- competitive spirit - 12

In addition to the numerous athletic offerings the following clubs are available to

Moniteau students:

- National Honor Society
- National Junior Honor Society
- Creepers and Crawlers
- Math Club
- Art Club
- Future Farmers of American (FFA)
- Future Homemakers of American (FHA)
- Future Teachers of America (FTA)
- Student Council
- Junior High Student Council
- Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)
- Spanish Club
- Japanese Club
- Mock Trial
- Sign Language Club
- Moniteau Mentors
- Improv Club
- Stock Market Club
- Gardening Club
- Academic Decathlon
- Pentathlon

- Yearbook
- Writing Center
- Math Center
- Sophomore Class Officers
- Junior Class Officers
- Senior Class Officers
- Marching Band
- Pep Band
- Ensemble
- Choir
- School Musical
- Vocational-Agriculture Programming

There are several community sponsored activities available to students in grades K-6, such as:

- football
- cheerleading
- basketball
- softball
- baseball
- scouting
- faith-based organizations

These groups are primarily parent led and, while they consist of Moniteau students, the district has no ties to them in any financial capacity. However, it should be noted that

students who begin their extracurricular endeavors in these programs, traditionally carry on with the programming during their high school years.

During the 2021-2022 school year the district's estimated budget was \$22,538,777.00, with \$21,062,079 in expenditures and \$21,695,510.75 in revenues. An additional \$3,977,547 was allotted in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) funding. The millage rate was 93.88 with one mil equating to approximately \$68,036. The athletic budget was approximately \$216,633.42, representing about one percent of the total budget, with the sports breakdown as follows:

- fall cheer = \$3875
- boys golf = \$3250
- cross country = \$3740
- football = \$32,385
- volleyball = \$10,307
- winter cheer = \$770
- boys basketball = \$15,203
- girls basketball = \$19,855
- softball = \$12,506
- baseball = \$13,086
- boys track and field = \$6658
- girls track and field = \$3996
- competitive cheer = \$6000
- girls golf 2= \$3100

The importance of researching how engagement opportunities affect school culture will allow the district to plan accordingly for future events. School culture can set the stage for the whether a student has a positive or negative school experience. That culture can also contribute to how alumni view their district and whether they may elect to remain in the district after their school years. Additionally, school culture shows us whether the current programming offered is working or reaching a majority of families and students.

Utilizing the measurement of engagement opportunities at Moniteau School District will assist in providing a more precise overview of school culture. This active research study will allow the district to determine if the needs of the students and/or community have been met and whether that culture is viewed in a positive or negative light. If the culture is viewed negatively, suggestions will be examined to assess how a more positive culture can be promoted. The comprehensive nature of the study will give the district access to a clear picture of each subject area and their affect on school culture.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, life is getting back to the pre-pandemic norms. This includes more students attending school in a brick-and-mortar setting and more and more activities available for students and their families. However, due to COVID-19 it is more important than ever for school districts to examine how opportunities are presented to families and whether those opportunities are meeting their needs; primarily in connection with the sense of school culture and how it is viewed by community stakeholders.

In all districts, but specifically at Moniteau, restrictions had to be placed on the number of people permitted at events, which usually translated to a student's immediate family members. The method in which the district contacted families changed from sending home papers to a variety of other methods meant to eliminate any germs that could be passed back and forth. Phone calls, text messages, social media posts, and notifications on the district website replaced all previous methods used to communicate with family members. Still, the question remains as to whether that approach is working and/or appreciated.

Moniteau School District must learn to adapt to the ever-changing educational climate and outline short and long-term plans that align with the new norms. Keeping that in mind, one area of focus for the district is school culture and how it is perceived through the lens of the community. Gathering this data allows the district to examine what methods of communication are preferable to garner the most results, but also what views the community holds regarding events, both educational and extracurricular. This

action research project will present data that permits the district to scrutinize how communication is effective or ineffective and how that may have an impact of events held at the district level.

Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic created, however unintentionally, a barrier between the district and its families. What were once viewed as traditional methods of communication are not the only methods preferred by families any longer. A whole host of ways to reach out to families was established during the course of the pandemic. These have now become more normal and preferable to some and may include text messages, emails and more. This action research study will also provide valuable insights about perceptions of different stakeholders within the school district and gather details regarding suggestions community members may have on improvements the district could consider.

Research has shown that families who work collaboratively with the school district assist in building a more positive school culture (Caridade et al., 2020). When parents are involved it tends to be because their child(ren) are involved, thus fostering support and a connection with the school district. Building upon that relationship allows both families and the school district to clearly establish involvement in their child(ren)'s lives and keeps them abreast of the mission of the district.

The most recent comprehensive plan, created and approved during the 2021-2022 school year, included a goal emphasizing the importance of the school-community connection and how the district would utilize its resources to ensure success in this particular area. The goal specifically states: by the 2024-2025 school year, the district will see an increase in community engagement opportunities available to families, which

will promote a stronger collaboration between all stakeholders to participate in the students' educational process. The district feels so strongly about the need for a more positive connection between home and school that it was built into the comprehensive plan to support success in this area.

School culture helps to set the stage for a student's positive or negative school experience. This perception may have a lasting impact on the student far beyond their school years. Retaining and maintaining district residents can be attributed to the success or failure of a district in establishing a positive school culture.

Chapter II outlined the benefits of the home and school connection and what methods have been employed that assist in fostering that relationship. That chapter looked in-depth at how each stakeholder has an impact on school culture and the connection between home and school. Additionally, rationale behind student engagement was provided in order to have a more complete understanding of what leads students, and in correlation, their families, to become involved in their school and/or district and what effect that has on the district-at-large.

Efforts were made to research all stakeholders, which include: school staff, administration, school board members, parents, guardians, the community-at-large, as well as extracurricular activities, social media presence, and implications with Title IX. Discerning the perceptions of these identified subsections allows the district to make changes, if necessary, in order to ensure the district is meeting the needs of its students, but also all stakeholders. The nature of the study provides the district with real-time snapshots of the community's perceptions of the specific research topics.

The research questions that correspond to the action research outcomes are as follows:

1. How do extracurricular opportunities factor into a district resident's perception of school culture?
2. What prohibitive factors do district residents perceive as having an effect on school culture?
3. Does the delivery method of engagement opportunities have an impact on the district resident's perception of school culture?
4. Does the district resident's perception of school culture change from the beginning to the end of the school year?

Setting and Participants

Moniteau School District is located approximately one hour north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the small, rural town of West Sunbury. The townships of Cherry, Clay, Concord, Marion, Venango and Washington, as well as the boroughs of Cherry Valley, Eau Claire and West Sunbury are housed within the 157 square miles of the district borders.

The district is comprised of two school buildings: Dassa McKinney Elementary School (Grades K-6) and Moniteau Junior-Senior High School (Grades 7-12) and served around 1270 students in the 2021-2022 school year. It is important to note the student population has been declining and is predicted to decline even more significantly over the next ten years. Preliminary numbers provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicate a decrease of roughly 300 more students over the next 5-10 years. With no economic growth in the community, the numbers do not appear promising that

there will be a growth any time in the near future. Table 1 refers to the gender breakdown, by grade level, during the 2021-2022 school year. The students not accounted for in the chart are those in out-of-district placements.

Table 1

Student Enrollment by Grade in the 2021-2022 School Year

Grade Level	Females	Males	Total Students
Kindergarten	37	42	79
1 st Grade	40	57	97
2 nd Grade	44	49	93
3 rd Grade	44	41	85
4 th Grade	51	42	93
5 th Grade	52	59	111
6 th Grade	44	55	99
7 th Grade	60	45	105
8 th Grade	57	42	99
9 th Grade	33	55	88
10 th Grade	59	54	113
11 th Grade	48	50	98
12 th Grade	53	57	110
District Totals	622	648	1270

Roughly 50% of the district is considered Economically Disadvantaged and 20% of the students are identified as qualifying for Special Education services. Moniteau

School District employs approximately 170 employees which include: teachers, coaches, advisors, nurses, counselors, secretaries, paraprofessionals, custodial staff, cleaning staff, food service staff, administrators, a business manager and a superintendent. The district’s budget in the 2021-2022 school year was \$22,538,777.00 with a millage rate of 93.88. One mill of taxes generated approximately \$68,000. Table 2 refers to the district demographics during the 2021-2022 school year.

Table 2

District Demographics During the 2021-2022 School Year

Category	Student Percentage
White	97.22%
Black	.34%
American Indian	.17%
Pacific Islander	.08%
Multi-racial	2.19%
Hispanic	.25%
Males	52%
Females	48%
Economically Disadvantaged	50%
Special Education	20.08%

Students from the Moniteau School District engage in a variety of post-secondary plans, which include, but are not limited to: four-year colleges/universities, trade or

technical schools, community colleges, two-year colleges, military, employment and undecided. Table 3 refers to the post-secondary plans for the Class of 2022.

Table 3

Post-Secondary Plans for the Class of 2022

Post-Secondary Option	Percentage
Four-year Colleges or Universities	46%
Trade or Technical Schools	14.5%
Military	6.6%
Employment	19.7%
Undecided	13.2%

Numerous extracurricular opportunities are offered at the junior high, junior varsity and varsity levels, as well as multiple clubs and other organizations. The athletic budget during the 2021-2022 school year was \$216,633.42. Table 4 refers to the athletic offerings offered to students in grades 7-12 at the junior high, junior varsity and varsity levels.

Table 4

Athletic Opportunities (Grades 7-12)

Club/Sport	Junior High	Junior Varsity	Varsity
Football	X	X	X
Cross Country	X		X
Volleyball	X	X	X
Golf			X

Basketball	X	X	X
Competitive Spirit	X		X
Baseball	X	X	X
Softball	X	X	X
Track and Field	X		X
Sideline Cheer	X	X	X

During the 2021-2022 school year 276, of the eligible 613 or roughly 45%, student-athletes participated on one or more sports teams. Of those 276, 92 participated in junior high sports and 184 participated at the junior varsity and varsity levels. In addition to athletic offerings numerous clubs and organizations were available to students in grades 7-12. Table 5 refers to the clubs and organizations offered to students in grades 7-12.

Table 5

Clubs and Organizations Offered by Grade Level

Club	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
National Honor Society				X	X	X
National Junior Honor Society	X	X				
Creepers and Crawlers			X	X	X	X
Math Club	X	X	X	X	X	X
Art Club			X	X	X	X

Future Farmers of America			X	X	X	X
Future Homemakers of America			X	X	X	X
Future Teachers of America			X	X	X	X
Student Council	X	X	X	X	X	X
Future Business Leaders of America			X	X	X	X
Spanish Club			X	X	X	X
Japanese Club	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mock Trial			X	X	X	X
Sign Language Club	X	X	X	X	X	X
Moniteau Mentors	X	X	X	X	X	X
Improv Club				X	X	X
Stock Market Club						X
Gardening Club			X	X	X	X
Academic Decathlon			X	X	X	X

Pentathlon	X	X				
Yearbook			X	X	X	X
Writing Center Tutors					X	X
Math Center Tutors					X	X
Class Officers			X	X	X	X
Marching Band	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pep Band	X	X	X	X	X	X
School Musical	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ensemble			X	X	X	X
Choir	X	X	X	X	X	X

Clubs and organizations were comprised of approximately 252 students or 43% of the student population throughout the school year. There were 13 faculty advisors for these clubs. In addition to the above-mentioned clubs and organizations, several other clubs and organizations are funded by organizations outside of the school district. These include, but are not limited to: youth football, youth basketball, youth baseball and softball, youth cheerleading, faith-based organizations, scouting and numerous others.

The action research provided data that was collected using a survey (Appendix B), which consisted of 22 questions. Four of those questions were specific to previous answers. For example, if you answered no to the previous question please explain why.

The survey used a series of open-ended, short answer and multiple-choice questions.

Prior to beginning, the survey participants were provided with an informed consent disclosure form (Appendix A). This disclosure form answered the following questions for participants:

- purpose of the study
- participation information
- benefits of the study
- risks that may be associated with the study
- confidentiality
- how to opt out of the study
- Institutional Review Board approval
- who questions should be directed to
- consent to participate

Prior to starting the study, the directions also identified all areas outlined in the informed consent disclosure form. The survey gathered responses from 119 participants over a two-week period during the February survey window, which began on February 6, 2023 and concluded on February 17, 2023.

Research Plan

During the review of literature in Chapter II, the information reviewed focused on the importance of school culture and how different groups can have an impact on that culture. Parents, peers, teachers and administrators all can have an effect on school culture and whether, or how, students can become engaged in their district. Furthermore, the research indicated how student engagement can be altered by negative perceptions of

school culture. As Riekie et al. (2017) stated: “It is in the best interests of schools to develop students’ sense of belonging as it contributes to the overall sense of community and school culture.” Learning what makes the community feel more connected to the school district and utilizing those connections to enhance the dynamics of the school-home connection allows the district to promote a positive culture and continue to build upon that concept. This tenet led to the four specific research questions identified for this project.

Utilizing the notion that student engagement leads to family engagement (Lam et al., 2016) the district will be able to determine what sort of activity or event draws those people to the school(s). Additionally, the district will be able to determine what reasons are behind low or no participation rates. Is that due to something on the district’s behalf or are there extenuating circumstances beyond even the district’s control? Finally, by gathering the information about preference of method of contact, the district can find out whether the current manner of information sharing is reaching the community and, if so, what methods are best for that purpose and which methods do not work to the benefit of the district.

A quantitative research design was used for the purposes of this study since, “Quantitative research relies on the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control variables and phenomena of interest” (Mertler, 2022, p. 107). The data gathered will give the district the opportunity to make generalizations about the research topics as a whole. Survey research is used to: “...describe characteristics of a group or population” (Mertler, 2022, p. 111). While survey research can be beneficial, it

can also have certain drawbacks, such as: low response rates and people's perceptions of the topics (Mertler, 2022).

The survey was given to participants twice over the course of the school year: once at mid-year (February) and again at the conclusion of the school year (May). A two-week window was used for the survey deployment. After that time period, the link to the survey was deactivated and no additional responses could be provided. Two identical surveys were used to determine if the community felt differently about the district's practices from mid-year until the end of the school year. Furthermore, events differed significantly throughout the school year. The survey provides insight for the district on what events or activities received the most reception and those that may have not reached as many families.

The questions were created specifically for the purpose of this study. Each question assists the researcher in answering one of the four established research questions. These questions will allow the school district to interpret the perception of school culture from the viewpoint of community engagement. Methods of communication will be reviewed to understand the preferred communication method of the community in regard to sharing important information. Finally, the district will learn the methods that students and their families may encounter from becoming or remaining engaged with their school or district. From this data, the district can plan accordingly, using both short and long-term goals to respond to the gathered information.

Jessiman et al. (2022) found that a positive school culture can be associated with positive results in the health and welfare of students, but also positively impact student behaviors and academics. While this study did not examine those particular

characteristics, it could be assumed that participation in extracurriculars leads to increased academic results due largely in part to the eligibility requirements of student-athletes. A separate study would need to be conducted to review how culture promotes health and wellness as this was not an area of study at this time.

As Barr and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2007) found, more prosocial relationships are established with all stakeholders when students perceive school culture as generally positive. A mutually beneficial relationship is established between students and their surrounding stakeholders. This relationship may be the impetus for a positive school culture as viewed by everyone involved.

Fiscal implications of the project are to be considered for any future programming the district may consider as a result of the data received. No budget was set for the project as at this stage it was only an examination of perceptions related to school culture. However, depending on the data, it may be necessary to explore the necessity of adding new activities, events, clubs or organizations, in addition to methods of communication for the community. These communication methods could include advertisements, a district established app, mailings and postings, to name a few.

Finances may become a small or very significant factor once it is determined how the district will view and prioritize the research. Short and long-term implications can then be decided upon as the district learns how to foster a culture that is either viewed upon favorably or is an improvement of the current perceived school culture. This will all be a result of utilizing the data in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The financial needs or implications of the research are unknown at this time.

Research Methods and Data Collection

The researcher conducted a quantitative action research design for the study. Participants were asked several questions regarding topics related to: school culture, engagement opportunities and communication methods. All participants were residents of the Moniteau School District. Prior to beginning the data collection, approval was applied for from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix C) on August 15, 2022. Approval, with stipulations, was received from the IRB on September 27, 2022 (Appendix D). Updates to the application were resubmitted on September 29, 2022 with the final acknowledgement received on October 4, 2022.

A survey was distributed to the Moniteau community on Tuesday, February 14, 2023 employing the following methods:

- Skylert-email and text message (Appendix E)
- district Facebook page
- district website

Skylert was used to ensure current district families were able to complete the survey. Facebook and the district website were used to reach the larger Moniteau community and those who may live in the district, but do not have a current student registered.

Additionally, data was gathered by the researcher who attended district events and observed attendance rates as well as observed interest in the activity (i.e. staying until the end, active participation, etc...). Notes outlining observations of those district events may include: athletic events, musical events, academic events, and club meetings to name a few. The notes indicated whether an event was presumed to be well attended, but was not relied upon as the only manner in which to determine this criterion. Furthermore, some

events encouraged crowd participation while others did not, so attendance alone was not indicative of an event’s perceived popularity or importance.

These notes were solely from the perspective of the researcher and were based upon comparisons to previous observations over the last seven years of employment within the district. For example, was last year’s musical better attended than in previous years and the rationale for why the researcher felt that was the case, was noted. A more detailed analysis may include that the director of the musical offered a preview showcase to all district employees on Thursday evening (prior to opening night). This may have had an effect on the number of tickets sold for the actual performances because more district staff took advantage of the Thursday night dress rehearsal performance. Additionally, attendance may have been better in the previous year because it was a Disney production whereas this year it was not.

Table 6 refers to the detailed data collection timeline of the study.

Table 6

Data Collection Timeline

Research Question	Type of Data	Data Source	Timeline
How do extracurricular opportunities factor into a district resident’s perception of school culture?	Quantitative	Observational data-counting number of attendants, or tickets sold at each event	January – May 2023
	Qualitative	Observational data-is there school spirit at the event? Is it more adults than students or vice versa? (Field notes)	1 st Survey= for two weeks after semester one ended (2/6/23-2/17/23)
		Online survey	2 nd Survey= for two weeks prior to the end of school (5/15/23-5/26/23)

		questions 2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12	Events within the timeframe
What prohibitive factors do district residents perceive as having an effect on school culture?	Quantitative	Online survey questions 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15 16, 17	January – May 2023
	Qualitative	deal with reasons why residents may not feel the culture is positive and why that may be	1 st Survey= for two weeks after semester one ended (2/6/23-2/17/23)
		Observational data-monitoring the district Facebook page for comments and questions about events	2 nd Survey= for two weeks prior to the end of school (5/15/23-5/26/23)
		Informal conversations with district residents via face-to-face, phone conversations, emails (Field notes)	Events within the timeframe
Does the delivery method of engagement opportunities have an impact on district resident’s perception of school culture?	Quantitative	Online survey questions 1, 2, 8, 9	January – May 2023
	Qualitative	specifically asks what the preferred delivery method is for district residents and also if gender or alumni status has any weight on the answers	1 st Survey= for two weeks after semester one ended (2/6/23-2/17/23)
		Observational data-attendance at event and monitoring which method of delivery was used for each event (if it varies)	2 nd Survey= for two weeks prior to the end of school (5/15/23-5/26/23)
			Events within the timeframe

		<p>Informal conversations with district residents (phone, email, and face-to-face) how information is communicated</p> <p>Posts made to the district Facebook page about how information is conveyed to families and district residents</p>	
<p>Does a district resident's perception of school culture change from the beginning to the end of the school year?</p>	<p>Quantitative</p>	<p>Measurement of attendance at district events (which events are attended more (time of year, sport, activity, number of student participants)</p> <p>Online survey questions 1, 2, 10-18 asks participants to rank school culture as they perceive it and how they feel about culture in general and whether gender or alumni status have a different perspective</p>	<p>January – May 2023</p> <p>1st Survey= two weeks after semester one ended (2/6/23-2/17/23)</p> <p>2nd Survey= two weeks prior to the end of school (5/15/23-5/26/23)</p> <p>Events within the timeframe</p>

The topic of research was selected based upon a theory that school culture at Moniteau is perceived in a negative light and that the district does not care about improving that image. Additionally, creating a stronger connection between home and school is important, especially during the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic where the district was not permitted to encourage a consistent, welcoming message to the

community. Because of restrictions from the state and federal governments it became more and more difficult to engage families in their child's educational process.

Reestablishing that connection will be essential to foster a more collaborative, cohesive relationship that aligns to the district's mission statement: "Our mission is to prepare Moniteau students to achieve their fullest potential as they face the challenges of life" (Moniteau School District, 2023).

Validity

"Validity of research refers to the degree to which research conclusions can be considered accurate and generalizable" (Mertler, 2022, p. 134). The participant sample were all within the Moniteau School District. Furthermore, the research is being used to ascertain the perceptions of Moniteau families therefore the research can be considered valid in its generalizability. However, this research may not be applicable to any setting outside of the Moniteau School District. The purpose of this research is not to make correlations to any setting beyond Moniteau, but simply for the district to learn and grow and possibly a format outline for others to follow should they desire to collect similar data, from the information presented.

Data was gathered by using surveys and informal observations by the researcher. Using these two methods of data collection allowed the researcher to see how the participant perceived answers regarding school culture, but also allowed a visual interpretation of what events relate to school culture. These field notes include answers to how well attended an event may be, whether there was active participation by the crowd or audience, and who was included in the crowd or audience to name a few.

Summary

This chapter presented the rationale for why the research was needed, how the data was collected, and then how it was analyzed. A quantitative research design was used to answer the four research questions regarding perceptions of school culture. The research questions were prepared in order to answer perceptions of engagement opportunities, prohibiting factors relating to engagement, preferred methods of communication and whether perceptions of school culture changed from mid-year to the end of the school year. Observations gathered during school events, as well as answers provided from the surveys, will be used to determine the answers to the research questions.

Research has demonstrated the importance of school culture and its resulting impact on engagement levels. Using the data in this study provides the district with the opportunity to develop short and long-term goals surrounding school culture as it pertains to engagement opportunities. The data also permits the district to determine whether the current communication methods are preferable to previous methods or if there is some other manner which the community would prefer to use.

Chapter IV will examine the specific results of the study and provide the data that supports or denies the hypotheses and will allow the researcher to draw conclusions based on that data. Suggestions will be made on further research and the implications that that research could have on school culture. Additionally, suggestions will be made that encompass more than the Moniteau community and how that may have a broader impact on school culture in general. Finally, an overview will be provided on how this research will have an immediate or long-term impact on the Moniteau School District.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unintentional divide between the school district and its stakeholders. The circumstances forced families to remain at home where virtual learning became the norm. Virtual meets and phone calls took the place of face-to-face meetings and conferences. Unfortunately, the lack of in-person events created a shift in the district's culture. More than ever before, students and parents have indicated they feel disconnected from the school district. The administration felt it was necessary to gather data to understand how district families feel about the current school culture. Examining school culture allows the Moniteau School District to prepare future plans and create short and long-term goals, focused solely on the relationships between the district and its stakeholder groups.

Research has shown that families who work collaboratively with a school district assist in building a more positive school culture (Caridade et al., 2020). This action research study looked at perceptions of school culture by reviewing the engagement opportunities provided by the district and the methods in which the district announces these opportunities. The study focused on a small, rural school district in Western Pennsylvania with efforts dedicated to creating a positive school culture. The research questions guiding this action research study were:

1. How do extracurricular opportunities factor into a district resident's perception of school culture?

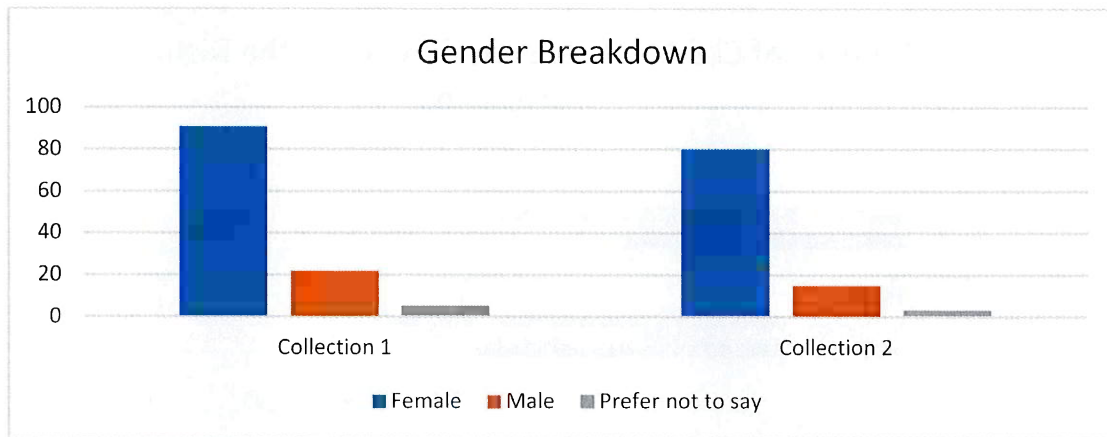
2. What prohibitive factors do district residents perceive as having an effect on school culture?
3. Does the delivery method of engagement opportunities have an impact on the district resident's perception of school culture?
4. Do the district resident's perception of school culture change from the beginning to the end of the school year?

This chapter contains the results of how district residents perceive the culture in the Moniteau School District. The data gathered was the culmination of a survey given at two different times during the school year. The data will present the rationale behind why district residents perceive school culture in the manner in which they do.

Survey Summary

The survey used was specifically created for the study, was given at two points in the school year, and was comprised of eighteen questions. The questions were a mixture of multiple choice and short answer. The first collection period began on February 6, 2023 and concluded on February 17, 2023. The second collection period opened on May 22, 2023 and concluded on May 31, 2023. During collection one, 119 participants answered the survey questions and 98 participants responded to survey collection two.

Survey Question 1 asked participants to indicate their gender. The gender breakdown of Collection 1 was as follows: 91 females, 22 males and 5 who preferred not to say. One participant elected to not answer this question. Collection 2 had the following gender information: 80 females, 15 males and 3 who preferred not to say. Figure 1 displays the gender breakdown of Collection 1 and Collection 2.

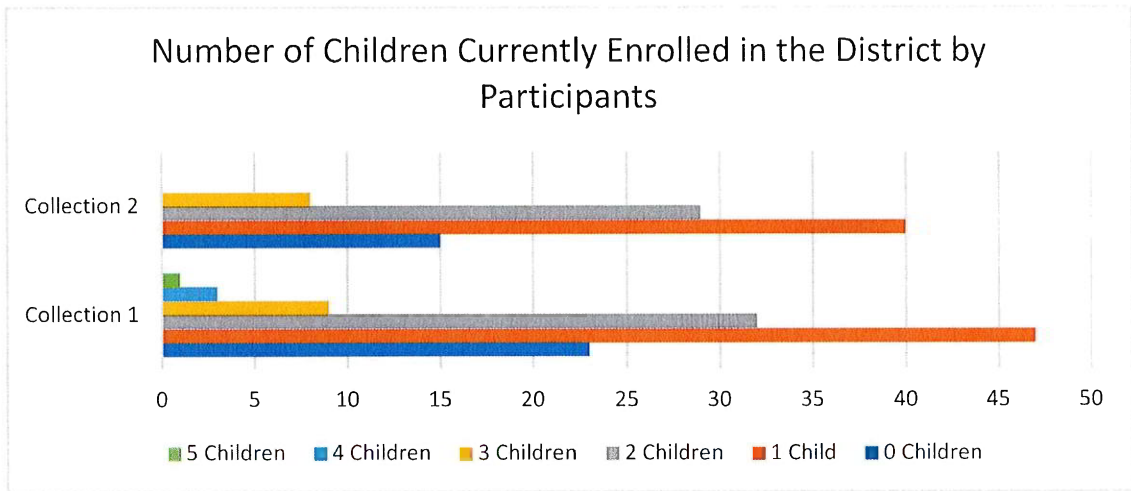
Figure 1*Gender Breakdown of Collections 1 and 2*

Survey Question 2 asked if the participant was an alumnus of the Moniteau School District. In Collection 1, 55 participants indicated that they were alumni of Moniteau, while 63 participants were not. Collection 2 yielded 41 alumni participants and 56 non-alumni participants.

Survey Question 3 asked participants to answer if they had children in the district by selecting a number. The majority of participants either had 1 or 2 children currently enrolled in the District. There were 47 participants with 1 child in Collection 1 and 40 participants in Collection 2. Thirty-two participants had 2 children enrolled during Collection 1 and 29 participants in Collection 2. A small number of participants had 3 children: 8 in Collection 1 and 9 in Collection 2. Three participants with 4 children were only found in Collection 1 and 1 participant indicated they had 5 children. No participants indicated they had more than 5 children. An additional number of participants had no children enrolled in the district: 23 in Collection 1 and 15 in Collection 2. The numbers were fairly consistent between the two collection periods. This data is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2

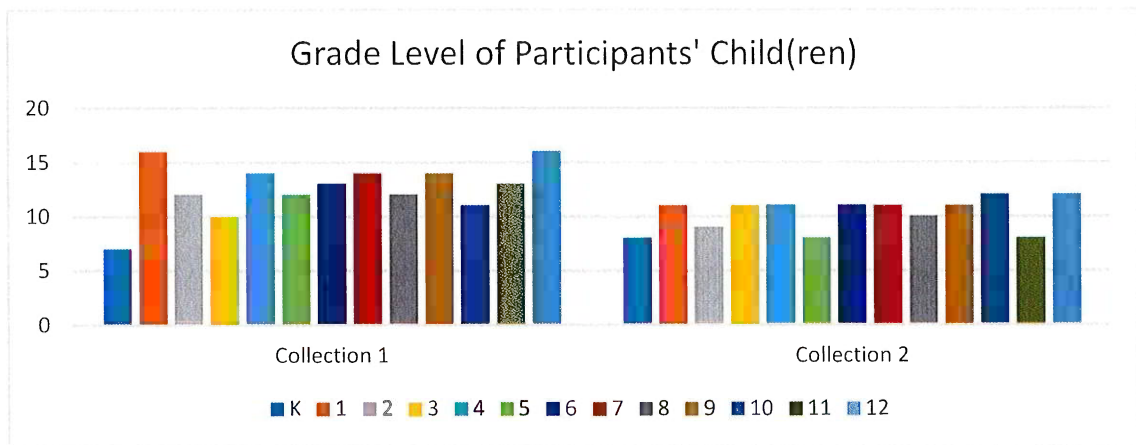
Participants Number of Students in District



Survey Question 4 asked participants to select the current grade level of their child(ren) during the 2022-2023 school year. The results are displayed in Figure 3. The two samples had a fairly decent representation from all grade levels.

Figure 3

Grade Level of Participants' Students

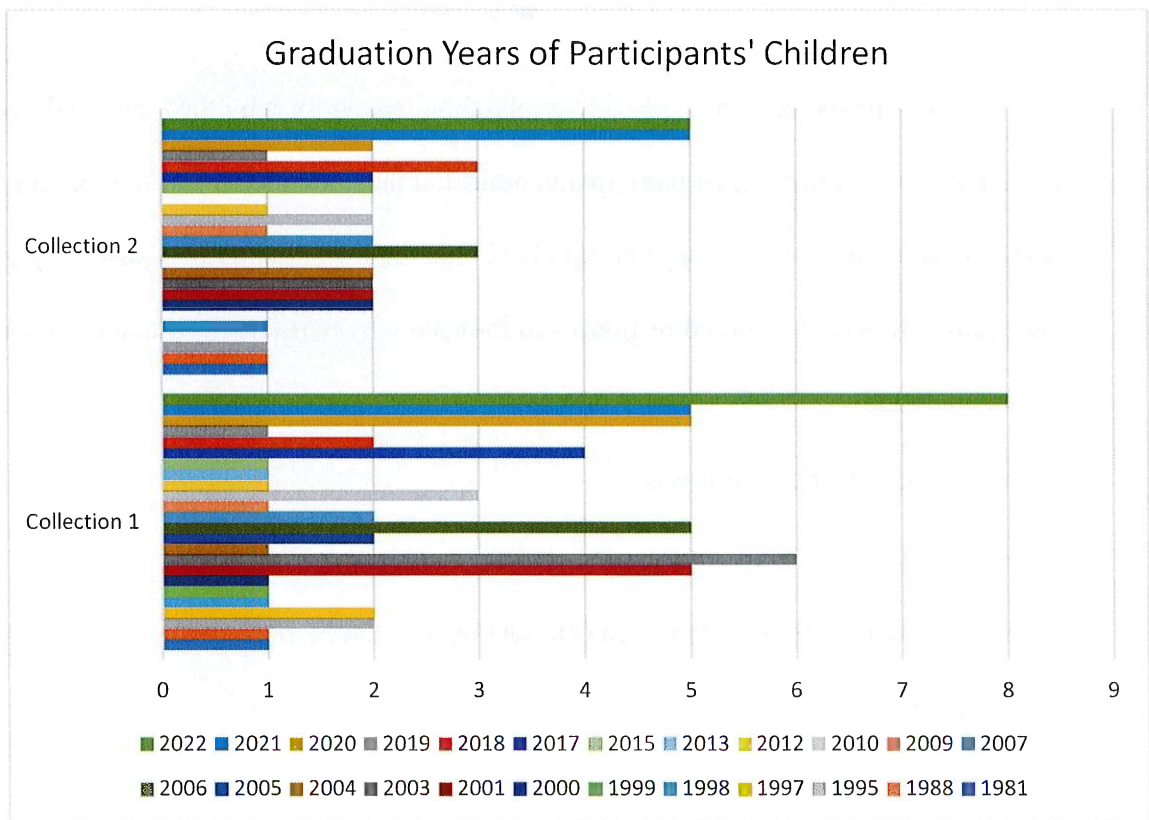


Survey Question 5 asked participants to indicate whether they had any children who were considered alumni of the Moniteau School District. Participants from Collection 1 indicated that 36 had children who were alumni and 82 did not. In Collection

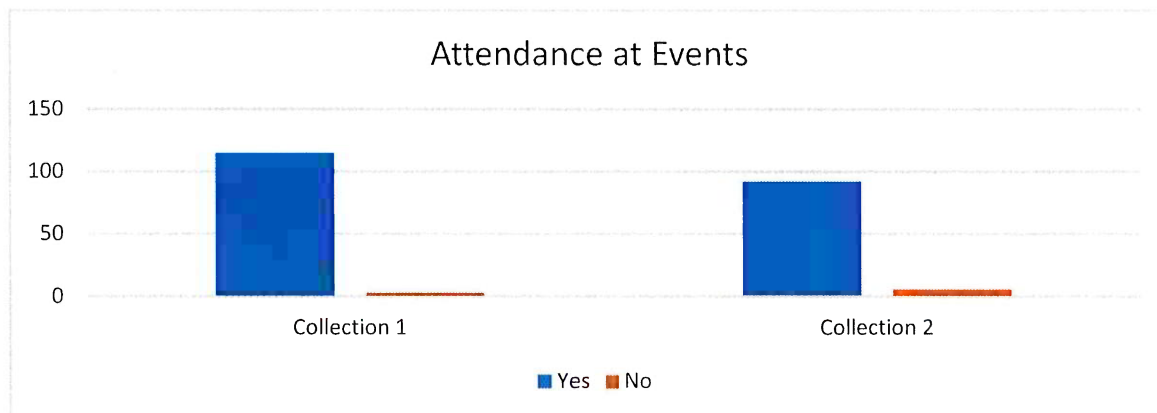
2, 24 participants had student alumni and 73 did not. As a follow up to question 5, participants were asked to indicated the year(s) their child(ren) graduated from Moniteau. Responses ranged from 1981 until 2022. The majority of participants had children who graduated in the previous 3 years. Figure 4 shows how many participants had children graduate in the specified years.

Figure 4

Graduation Year of Participants' Children



Survey Question 6 asked participants whether they had attended any events at the school in previous years. The type of event was not given, as participants had the option to interpret what they felt an event would be. An overwhelming majority of participants attended an event at the school for each collection. Figure 5 shows the response from participants for question 6.

Figure 5*Attendance at Events in Previous Years*

Participants were then asked to explain the reason for why they attended events. In both data collections most participants indicated they attended because their child(ren) participated in the event. A large group also indicated they attended because they enjoyed the events offered. Additional responses to indicate why participants attended school events included:

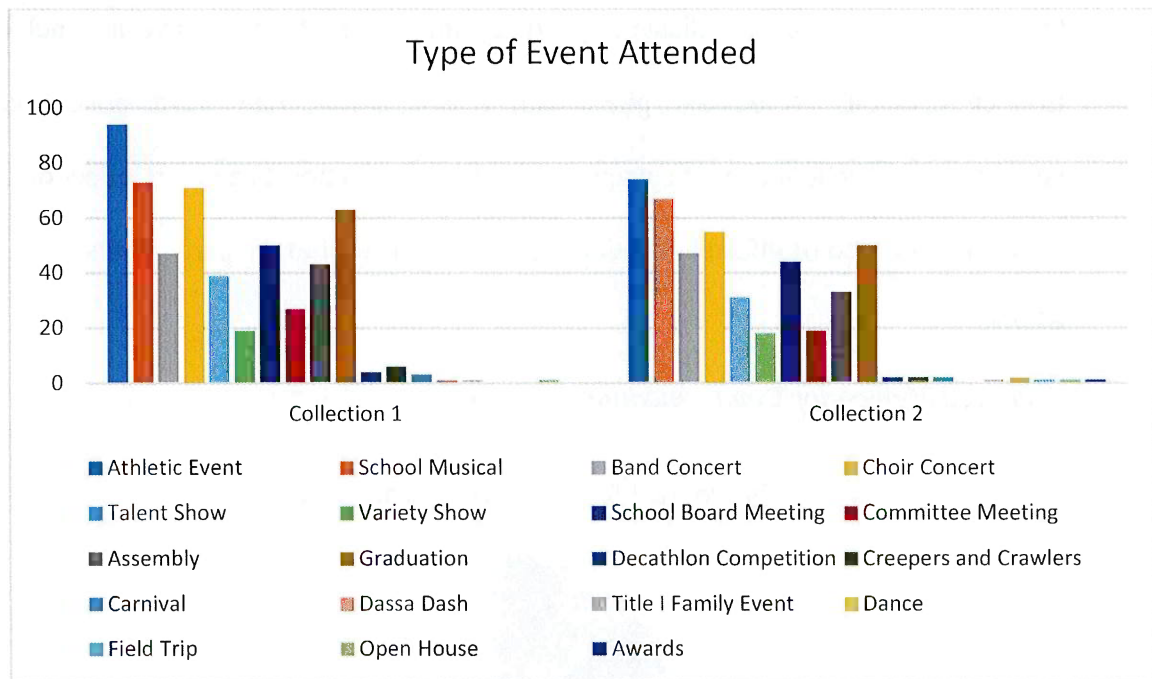
- school/District employee
- coach
- family members participated (grandchildren, nieces, nephews)
- support friends
- child asked participant to take them
- financial and community support for the district
- chaperone
- organized or in charge of the event

Survey Question 7 asked participants what type of events they attended at the school. Figure 6 shows the answers received for the type of events. Responses included:

Athletic Events, Musicals, Concerts, Talent Shows, Variety Shows, School Board Meetings, Committee Meetings, Graduations, Assemblies, Academic Decathlon Competitions, Creepers and Crawlers Events, Carnivals, the Dassa Dash, Title I Family Events, Dances, Field Trips, Open Houses, and Awards Ceremonies.

Figure 6

Type of Event Attended



Survey Question 8 asked participants to indicate how they heard about events offered at the school. The school district employs multiple methods to inform district stakeholders of the different opportunities for engagement. While the participants appreciated the manner in which the school reached out to them, the number one way they heard about events was through their child(ren). Seventy-seven percent of participants, during Collection 1, and 79% in Collection 2, received the most information from their student. Other popular methods included: school emails, school phone calls, school text messages, social media posts, school website information, and through word

of mouth from other parent/community members. Additional methods in which participants heard about events included: family members, teachers, flyers, district newsletters, the district calendar, booster clubs, papers sent home, the Dojo App, and posters displayed in the school building(s).

While the district employs a variety of methods for sharing information, it was essential to gather data indicating which method was preferred for participants. Survey Question 9 asks people to indicate their communication preference. Favorites included: from child, email, text message, phone call, website, letters, social media posts, local newspaper, and school announcements. Figures 7 (Collection 1) and 8 (Collection 2) show the preferred of information sharing from the district to the participants.

Figure 7

Preferred Method for Communication-Collection 1

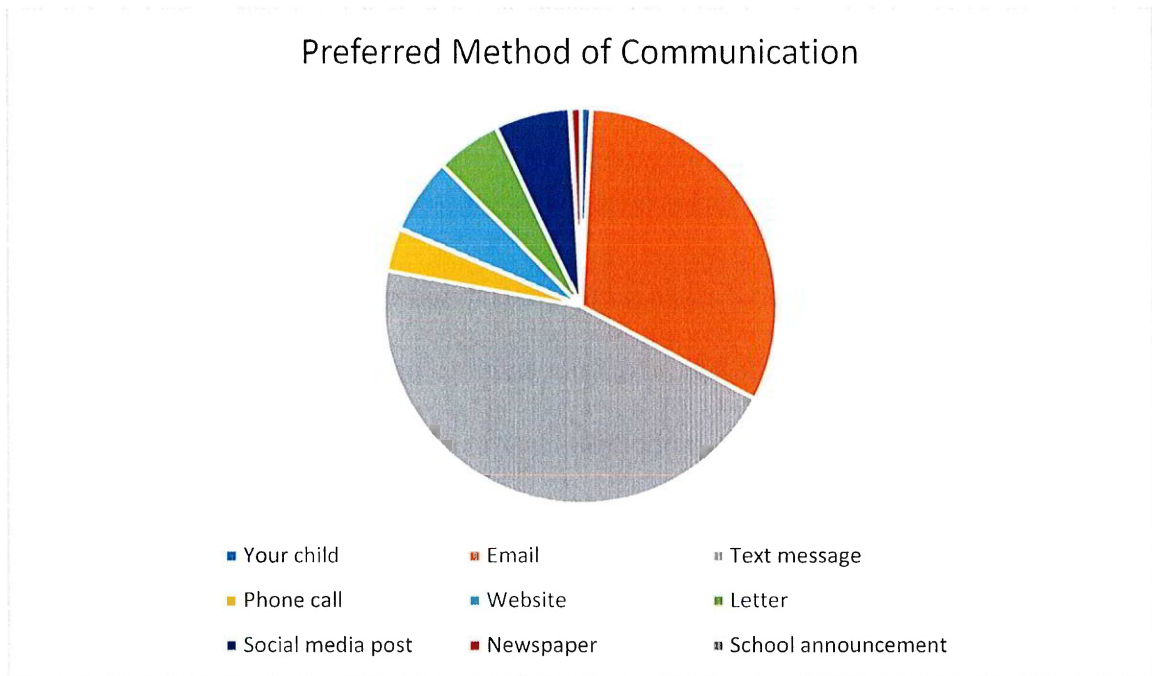
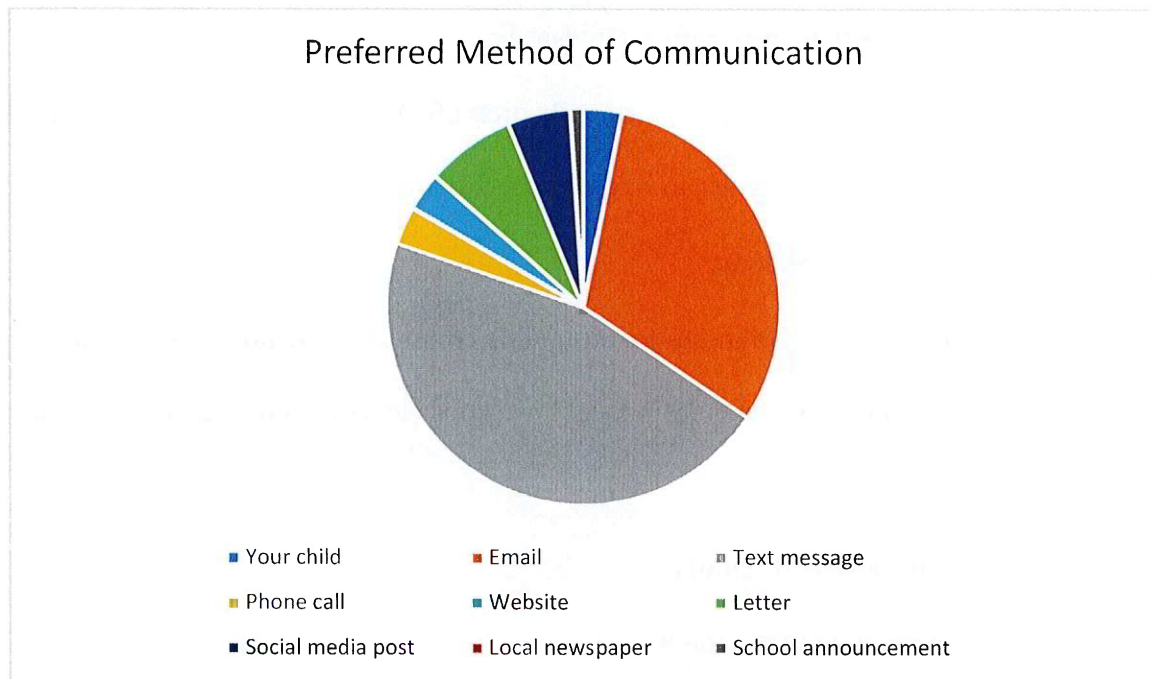


Figure 8*Preferred Method for Communication-Collection 2*

Survey Question 10 asked participants if there were other events they wished the school district would offer to students. The data indicated participants either were indifferent or thought what the district was offering was currently sufficient for students. This data is important to note because the district is invested in ensuring enough opportunities, and a variety of opportunities, are available for every student. While some responses indicated more events would be welcome, 66% (Collection 1) and 59% (Collection 2) of participants felt what was offered was enough. A follow-up to question 10 asked participants to indicate what additional offerings they would like to see, if any, from the district. The responses that follow reflected what individual participants stated they felt should be offered at Moniteau and their corresponding thoughts (if any):

- wrestling;
- archery;

- I wish we had more sports opportunities, soccer would be awesome;
- STEM activities;
- Mother son dances, father son dances;
- A before school program for early drop off. We work early in the morning and it is difficult sometimes to find someone to get our child on the bus;
- more sports options;
- fundraiser opportunities for struggling community members, community meetings, town halls from local townships etc. community center type activity;
- wrestling, archery;
- inline hockey program;
- job shadowing programs;
- I would like to see the school have more clubs pertaining to specific student interests (something for everyone)- these could meet during the school day, but possibly extend into other evening activities as well;
- rifle team;
- dances or event for kids: tournaments;
- career guidance;
- having student athletic directors/trainers;
- soccer;
- multicultural day...each grade has a different culture students go from different cultures could have stories, short videos, crafts and food from those cultures and students could have passports to stamp;
- summer programs/summer school/summer clubs;

- after school social activities, activities for students with disabilities to socialize;
- While I feel all events are educational (in some form), I would like to see some interesting assemblies be brought to Moniteau. Maybe once a year have an assembly to bring the school together. I am not a huge fan of “fun days” but I see their purpose. I would like to see the one man volleyball team or a good band (we had the army navy band back when I was in school and it was great) or the scared straight program (I think that’s what it was called, before prom to help students not drink and drive) or anything that gets the kids engaged, entertained and that they learn something meaningful in how to live a better and more purposeful life. Give them reasons to want to be a better person and help others out. Our students are so glued to their phones that I’d like to see them get “cultured” a little bit;
- volunteer programs would be nice, fundraising with events, anything that would involve the students being able to provide services for others;
- secret Santa shop;
- I would like to see more charitable events;
- school dances after games, and on special occasions;
- I would like to see better summer programming opportunities. My child is older, but I think it is important, especially for younger students. (Learning camps/enrichment programs, etc.) I have had parents ask about options, but we just do not offer them. BCCC has some great things happening, but that is a bit of a drive for many of our families, and it is also expensive;
- more athletic programs, higher developed math classes and better choices for electives;

- more after school clubs;
- board meeting broadcasted on YouTube;
- college tours, prom grand march;
- wrestling, soccer, opportunities for social interaction;
- elementary track and gardening club;
- rifle team;
- swimming;
- bring back drive tractor to school, Mr. Moniteau and wear 2 colors for graduation;
- guest speakers with relevant education/experience to inspire or inform students in future endeavors;
- trap shooting team or rifle team;
- soccer program;
- more opportunities to see different career choices;
- opportunities in areas in addition to athletics, helping all teens find an interest.

Survey Question 11 focused on events/opportunities for parents/community members by asking if there are enough events offered for this particular group of stakeholders. The overwhelming majority indicated that there were enough events offered with 71% (Collection 1) and 72% (Collection 2) agreeing that what the district currently offers meets the needs of this group. For those that indicated they did not feel there were enough events or those that stated unknown, an opportunity was given to express what event they would like to see offered. The list below indicates the events the individual participants would like to see for the parent/community stakeholder group:

- need community engagement;

- more about admin than kids;
- community exercise programs;
- I have seen in some areas where schools “host” evening activities for the community-music lessons, book club, intramural sports, etc. I think it’s a great use of the nice building that we have;
- parents vs. students dodgeball or kickball;
- adult learning;
- community dinners, community days;
- I feel there’s a ton of events and opportunities available to everyone. Sometimes families feel that they need to be asked to show up to stuff. I think that all calls/texts should be sent out once a quarter or something like that highlighting an event. Some families don’t feel welcomed because they have never been to an event. Reaching out here and there may encourage more families to attend events and to see older kids do sports and activities and may encourage younger students to partake in these activities. My nephew came to a high school basketball game tonight for the first time ever and he was so excited. I asked my sister to bring him and he wants to come again. If it wasn’t for me reaching out, he would’ve never showed up. I also feel another great way to get people to attend events is to offer free nights. Our community does not have a plethora of money. It's going to cost them \$10 in gas to get to the school and then an additional \$15-25 to get in to the school. That adds up. If there is a way to reduce the cost or at least allow students in for free, more community members would show up. A lot of families are driven by money;

- fitness center use, possible intramurals such as volleyball and basketball;
- I think the community is very out of touch with the school;
- it would be nice if we parents could attend all our kids events...talent show, Dassa Dash, etc;
- I would like to see fitness opportunities at the sport, open gym nights;
- I would like to see more collaboration with the community, mentorship, job shadow;
- charitable events;
- I would love to see more opportunities for parents to be involved, and work along with their children. Perhaps more interactive clubs and/or classes in the evenings, etc;
- adult courses;
- parents feel unwelcome in the school and most parent/student events are no longer taking place;
- adult use for fitness, intramurals, recreation;
- prom grand march, events like breakfast with mom and or dad (elementary school);
- a greater engagement from the community as a whole. If the students are excited, they'll get their families excited. Community events can enhance a positive school culture;

The importance of school culture was asked in Survey Question 12. Participants indicated the value of school culture with 93% (Collection 1) and 96% (Collection 2) of participants stating that culture is important. Survey Questions 13 and 14 asked

participants to rate how supportive different stakeholder groups are of the student population. Figure 9 displays the level of perceived support for students from the faculty and staff, while Figure 10 shows the perceived support from the administration group.

Figure 9

Support from the Faculty and Staff for the Student Population

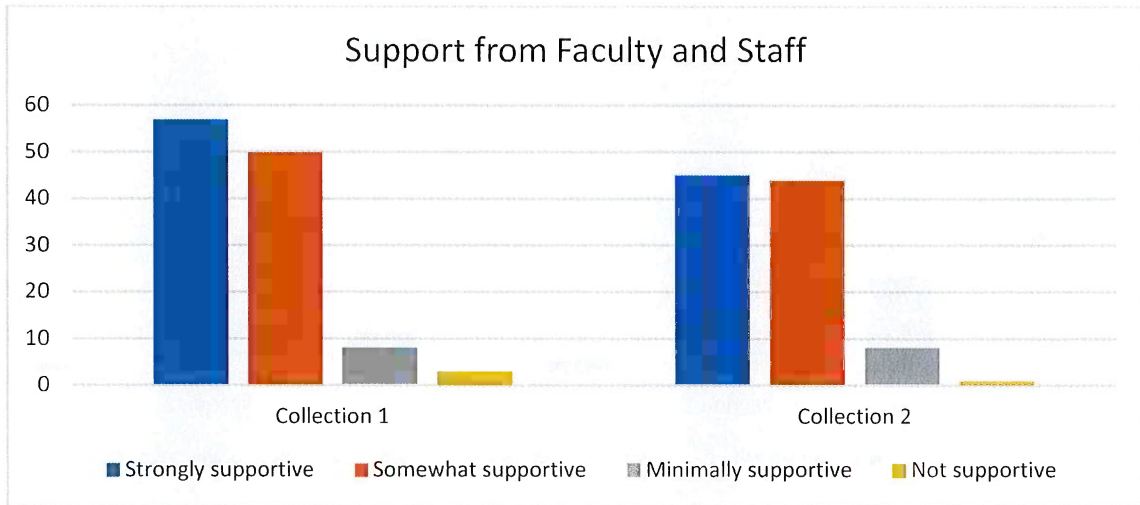
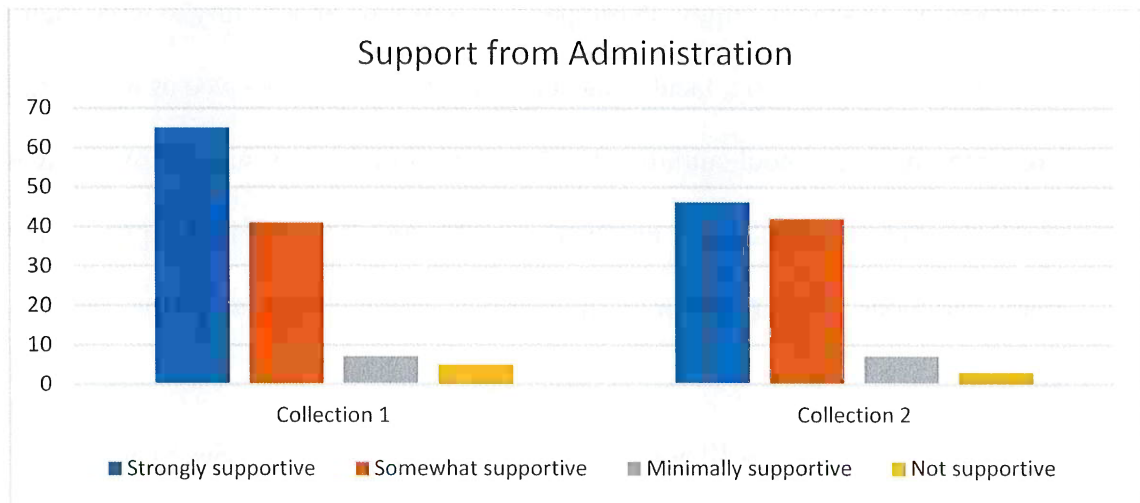


Figure 10

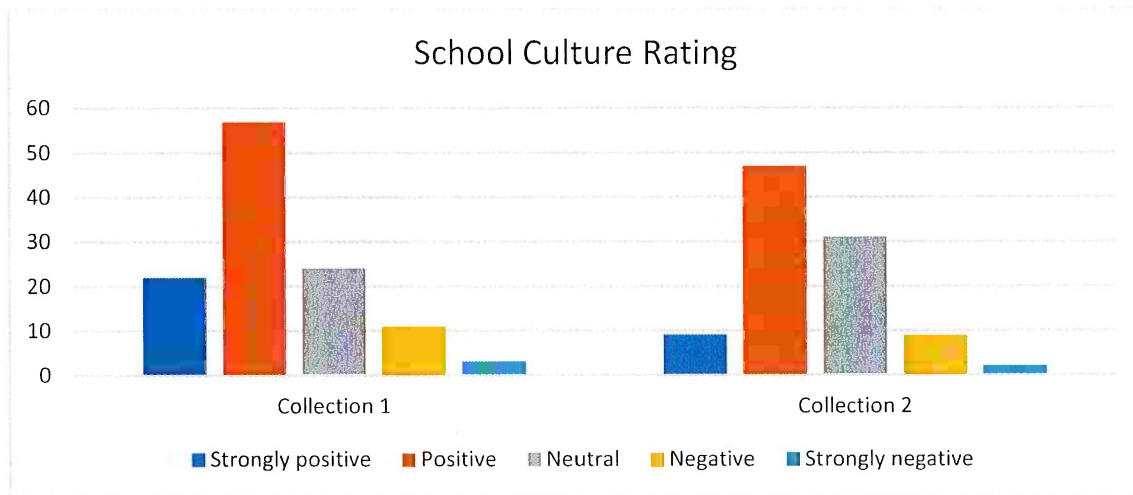
Support from the Administration for the Student Population



Survey Question 15 asked participants to rate the current school culture at Moniteau. This question indicated the majority of participants felt the culture was strongly positive or positive. Figure 11 shows the data reflected in Survey Question 15.

Figure 11

School Culture Rating



Survey Question 16 asked participants to indicate whether they felt faculty and staff involvement, student involvement, or community involvement was more important as they relate to school culture. Participants also had the opportunity to write their own answer. In each collection, faculty and staff involvement was viewed as having the greatest impact on school culture (52% and 43%), followed by student involvement (28% and 32%) and then community involvement (16% and 19%). Write-in answers included many variations of teamwork or all three groups working together for the benefit of the students.

Survey Questions 17 and 18 were open-ended questions where participants were asked to indicate what one thing positively affects school culture and what one thing

negatively affects school culture. Several themes emerged from the answers. A sampling of those themes are listed below for Survey Question 17 (positively affect):

- teachers and staff engagement and support
- positive attitudes
- communication
- community engagement and support
- student engagement
- trust
- student involvement
- extracurriculars
- accountability
- consistency
- respect

A sampling of the themes that emerged in Survey Question 18 (negatively affect) are listed below:

- bullying
- attitude of teachers, administrators, parents, and board members
- communication
- narrow-mindedness
- trust
- student involvement
- faculty and staff involvement
- parent involvement

- inclusion
- respect
- technology (social media)
- personal agendas
- negative speak
- funding

Research Question 1

Extracurricular events are one method in which the district employs to bring together the community and the school district. Several events are offered throughout the school year targeting multiple stakeholder groups. Events have the ability to bring the community together, especially after the forced separation period that was due to COVID-19. Survey participants had the opportunity to share their perceptions of the different types of events/offerings for both students and parents/community members. In each data collection, participants indicated they were satisfied with the number and type of events offered to both stakeholder groups. Survey results showed that participants attended any number of events throughout the school year for reasons other than their child was participating, with the second most selected reason being that they enjoy attending events. Other responses showed that teachers attended events to show their support for the students and yet others indicated a willingness to support friends or family members.

However, responses indicated ways in which the district could improve the offerings to both students and parent/community groups. Different extracurricular opportunities for students were suggested, with the most popular being new athletic

teams, such as: archery, rifle, swimming, soccer and wrestling. Some other popular answers for the student stakeholder group were dances, volunteer work, career exploration events and summer programming. Suggestions for more parent/community member events included: community exercise programs, adult learning, intramural events, fitness center use, events for their students where they could attend, and charitable events. One participant stated that “if the students are excited, they’ll get their families excited” thus ensuring more participation and attendance at events.

When asked to rate the current school culture at Moniteau, 79 of 117 respondents indicated that it was strongly positive or positive during the February collection window. When the survey was redistributed in May, 56 of 98 respondents indicated the culture was positive or strongly positive. A neutral response of 31 of 117 and 24 of 98 were received. Additionally, 11 of 117 and 9 of 98 responded that school culture was negative and 3 of 117 and 2 of 98 stated that school culture was strongly negative. During each data collection window, the responses indicates that the majority of participants felt positive about school culture (66%-Collection 1 and 57%-Collection 2).

Summary of Research Question 1

Prior to reviewing the data, it was assumed that the type of extracurricular events/opportunities would have an impact on the overall culture rating of the school. It was assumed that people who were happy with the current programming would feel that culture was better or more positive. Upon review, the data supports the assumption that people who are happy with the district’s current programming are also happy with the district’s culture in general. Suggestions were given on ways the school could improve upon the extracurricular opportunities in order to achieve a greater reach within the

student stakeholder group and the parent/community member stakeholder group. The data provides the perspective of what events are viewed as important or better attended than others. This information can assist the district in future budget planning should the need occur for an examination of extracurricular opportunities.

Research Question 2

Negative school culture can lead to no involvement or very limited involvement by the different stakeholder groups. School administrators have the ability to influence school culture: both positively and negatively (Harris, 2018). During data Collection 1, 89% of the 118 responses received indicated the administration group was either strongly supportive or somewhat supportive of the student population. In data Collection 2, 88% of the 98 participants felt administrators were strongly supportive or somewhat supportive of the student population. If administrators can have an impact on school culture, this data indicates the culture was expected to be positive, which was the given result.

Faculty and staff can also influence the culture of the school. Should this group have a negative attitude or be uninvolved or not supportive, the resulting culture rating can suffer. However, the data show that 89% of responses from Collection 1 and 90% of responses from Collection 2 labeled the faculty and staff as strongly supportive or somewhat supportive. This information yields an assumed positive school culture based on the information supporting the staff influence on culture. When students perceived their relationship with teachers to be more positive the climate was generally more positive and was viewed as a preventative measure for negativity (Peguero & Bracy,

2014). Conversely, negative interactions between teachers and students can lead to a breakdown in culture (Frolova et al., 2019).

Summary of Research Question 2

Participants showed that relationships played an important part in having an effect on school culture. The measure of the perception of faculty and staff, as well as the administration, indicated that the community felt the culture was indeed positive. However, should the responses have trended in a negative direction it would be assumed that the culture rating of the district would also have reflected a negative rating.

Participants were asked to answer two open-ended questions listing what they believed both positively and negatively impacted school culture. The data shows that a series of trends were found that stakeholders agreed had a negative impact on school culture. Involvement from all stakeholder groups was found to be of great importance. Communication and attitude were also two additional areas that can have a profound impact on school culture. These three areas were found most often in the resulting data. While other trends were found, the participants indicated that these three themes could have a profound impact on their perception of the culture.

Research Question 3

Participants were asked to share their preferred method of communication from the school district. They were also asked to inform the district of how they have heard about events in the past. Communication between home and school strengthens the involvement levels and shows a connection between home life and school life (Caridade et al., 2020). Communication is fundamental to the success of programming and building a school culture that feels welcoming and encouraging. Stakeholder groups highlighted

the importance of communication from the school: administration, teachers, coaches, school board members, etc... Each contact made by school personnel is another way the school district maintains open lines of communication and is transparent in the multiple occurrences available for students, parents, and all other stakeholder groups. Participants were asked to select their preferred method from the provided selections, but were also able to list any other method they preferred utilizing.

Summary of Research Question 3

In the age of digital information sharing, it comes as no surprise that the majority of participants preferred their information through email and text message. The days of mailing letters home and reading the newspaper for information appear to be a thing of the past. Conversely, social media posts had a very negligible response preference, which is surprising due to the amount of traffic the Facebook page sees on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Text message was the preferred method for receiving information from the district related to sharing information with district stakeholders (43% in Collection 1 and 45% in Collection 2). Email received the second highest score (30% in Collection 1 and 31% in Collection 2), followed by letters mailed home, social media posts and phone calls.

During the course of the pandemic, the district utilized the Skylert “all-call” system on a frequent basis to communicate new cases of COVID-19. Unfortunately, due to that reason stakeholders have stated that they no longer answer the phone calls and prefer to wait for the email or text message that they know will follow. Another surprising result was that parents did not prefer receiving information from their

child(ren). While there was no follow up question for this, it would be interesting to examine that rationale for that preference in future studies to learn why.

Even though parents did not prefer hearing about events from their child, 77% (Collection 1) and 76% (Collection 2) of participants indicated that they heard about events from their child(ren). Other methods listed as where participants heard about events are in order of importance, as ranked by participant responses (during both collections) are as follows: email from the school, all calls (phone calls) from the school, text message from the school, social media post, other parent/community member sharing information, school website, and the local newspaper. What was learned from this question is that technology has been a benefit to the district and is a great communication tool for the district. Ricks et al. (2021, p. 609) found that the use of social media can help “build engagement in one’s community.”

Research Question 4

This question examined whether the perception of school culture changed from one data collection period to the next. A series of questions were asked of participants to answer this particular research question, that included: whether they felt school culture was important; how supportive they felt the faculty and staff, as well as the administration group, were of the student population; and finally, they were asked to rate the current school culture. As the survey was anonymous, there was no way to track if the same group of people took it each time, so a true answer of whether their perception changed over time was not able to be answered with any definitive certainty. Also, persons could complete the survey more than once using various web addresses or technology.

Summary of Research Question 4

School culture was found to be important during both data collection periods, with 93% (Collection 1) and 96% (Collection 2) of participants stating they felt it was important. As the research has shown, the support of the faculty and staff and the administration can have a positive effect on the school's culture. Faculty and staff were rated as either strongly supportive or somewhat supportive during each collection (90%-Collection 1 and 89%-Collection 2). There was no significant change between the two collection windows. The administration was rated at strongly supportive and somewhat supportive (89% and 88%, respectively). Again, there was no significant change from Collection 1 to Collection 2.

There was a difference in the current school culture rating from Collection 1 to Collection 2. In Collection 1, more participants listed the culture at Moniteau as either strongly positive or positive (66%), with only 57% of participants in Collection 2 rated the district in such a manner. As a matter of fact, the strongly positive rating decreased by 9% from Collection 1 to Collection 2. The positive rating showed no change between the two collection periods. An interesting finding was that the neutral rating increased by 11% from Collection 1 to Collection 2. The ratings of negative and strongly negative did not change between the collections. In the future, it may be beneficial for the researcher to only survey the same people and ask a follow up question during the second survey if the rating changes from one collection period to the next and why that occurred.

Conclusion

Chapter IV provided the findings from the two surveys employed to learn about the perceptions of school culture. The data may be used to assist the district in future

planning regarding stakeholder engagement opportunities, which include the type of offerings made available and the method in which the district employs to communicate with stakeholders.

Technology is favored more often than older, traditional methods of communication. This may include text messages, email, and social media posts. These methods are preferred by district stakeholders over all other methods. Additionally, it was learned that the district is offering the types of events and activities that are attractive to students, parents, and community member, but suggestions were provided for areas of improvement or consideration.

Finally, the culture rating of the district is classified as positive. This rating includes separate ratings for the faculty and staff group and the administration group. It was evident that there are definitely areas the district is strong in when considering school culture, but there are methods that can be employed to improve culture, in general. Chapter V will provide the study's finding and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

School culture, in the Moniteau School District, is utilized as a measure of engagement. The District has viewed school culture as positive when the engagement comes from all stakeholders, but most notably: students, parents, and community members. With these three groups working together a more cohesive, positive approach to school culture is displayed. However, COVID-19 had an effect on school culture. With less opportunity for interaction between the schools and the families, a disconnect was established that the district is still working to overcome. While not intentional, the pandemic caused unexpected ramifications that the Moniteau School District is working toward correcting. School culture is one area in which the District has chosen to focus, with efforts dedicated to re-establishing school pride and encouraging engagement from all stakeholders through a plethora of events and other opportunities.

Along with the number of events and activities offered to students and their families, the District began a campaign to increase communication in a multitude of ways. One gift of the pandemic was moving from all paper information to more of a digital platform. Letters are no longer mailed home en masse and more opportunities are available to complete paperwork online for district families. The Skylert “all-call” system (phone, email, and text) was used throughout the pandemic. Since the community was familiar with this system, communication continued via this platform after a return to traditional brick-and-mortar schooling. The tenets behind education changed during the shutdown and it has forced the District to adapt to more modernized systems.

With the implementation of technology less opportunity for face-to-face interaction between the District and the community occurred. More people opted for telephone conferences or google meets instead of coming into the building. This was the same for extracurriculars since everything was livestreamed for a short time. The community could watch a football game from the comfort of their home without the added stress of driving to the event, finding parking, paying an entrance fee, finding a place to sit, and then purchasing additional snacks and raffle tickets. The costs alone can make attendance prohibitive. As livestreaming is no longer a convenient option for the district, more people are opting to return to attending events in-person. The focus of the District is to continue to improve school culture by ensuring we are meeting the needs of the stakeholders.

The goal of this action research study was to examine the perceptions of school culture. Specifically, an exploration was done of the preferred communication methods, the extracurricular opportunities currently available and what, if anything, could have a positive or negative impact on school culture. This chapter will offer conclusions based on the results of the data in addition to providing recommendations for any future research conducted.

General Overview

This action research study assisted the Moniteau School District with a measurement of school culture, as perceived by different district stakeholder groups. By utilizing the specially designed survey, an analysis was composed of a series of school culture measurements. Appendix B contains a copy of the survey instrument utilized for

the study. Community members were able to weigh in on what factors contributed, both positively and negatively, to school culture.

Every parent in the district had access to the survey, in addition to any district resident who checked in on the district's Facebook page and/or the district's website. Facebook analytics show that the school district has 1,884 followers. With approximately 1140 currently enrolled students in the district, figuring each student has a minimum of two parents/guardians, the number of participants in the study was relatively low. However, almost all participants felt culture was important. Only one person stated they felt school culture was not important and ten total participants (over the two surveys) were unsure if culture was important.

An examination of communication methods between the school district and the district's stakeholders were also explored. The data provided portrayed a picture of community member's preferences regarding communication methods and how the methods used may have had an effect on extracurricular attendance. Data was collected during the second semester of the 2022-2023 school year in February and again in May. During this time of year there are multiple opportunities for the community to engage with the school district. This time period, while short, provided a glimpse of the multiple methods of communication the district utilizes throughout the school year.

Two questions on the survey provided stakeholders the chance to give input on what they feel most positively and most negatively affects school culture. The resulting answers gave the District data to help determine what could be done, or not done, in the future to further develop school culture. The overall goal of the district is to generate a positive school culture. Discovering the methods that may be employed to provide that

sense of community and togetherness will assist the district in future endeavors. Many suggestions alluded to increasing the number of athletic offerings or extracurricular offerings, but other suggestions mentioned evening programming for the community.

These two questions provided a rather large sampling of areas where the community felt the district could grow. The data collected showed the district areas that were of importance to the community. Most of the suggestions were already known to the administration, but there were some areas that came as a surprise and went into depth about other ways we could meet the needs of our students.

Additional questions were asked where stakeholders were directed to indicate how supportive the following groups were of the student population: faculty and staff; administration. The data indicate that the participants felt the student population was supported by both groups. Most often the district hears about the negative occurrences between students and those two stakeholder groups (or any other groups). The data shows that while the loudest complaints are the ones heard most often, not everyone feels that way. In fact, the majority of participants felt that the support was not lacking and that the current school culture could be rated as positive. Faculty and staff were stated as having the greatest impact on school culture during both survey collections.

Working together was emphasized as being extremely important between all stakeholder groups in order to provide the most ideal environment possible. Positive school culture was suggested, by the participants, to be most positive when the students, the community, and the faculty and staff all worked together. When these three stakeholder groups became cohesive, the expectation of the community is that positive school culture will follow because everyone becomes more invested in the district. It is

important to note that the community felt the faculty and staff were supportive of the students. However, one area not explored was how the community felt about the community-at-large in relation to their supportiveness or lack thereof. A more comprehensive picture would be available if the community had to answer questions about the community-at-large and the students were able to provide feedback.

Overall, the feedback generated from the survey responses provided the district with building blocks for future success. The comments made, and the suggestions provided, offer an opportunity for the district to show that the voices of the community have been heard and that what they feel is important can also be important to the school system.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting any results or planning for future studies. The first limitation would be the sample size of each collection. With 1140 students currently enrolled in the school district, and additional number of community residents, the data collection samples were very small and may not be representative of the entire district. Data Collection 1 received 119 responses and Data Collection 2 received 98 responses. The survey was distributed in a variety of ways to ensure as many stakeholders were aware of and had access to the survey as possible. Methods employed were: Facebook postings, district website postings, district email and district text messages. In addition, word-of-mouth was used when talking with community members and an announcement was made during several public school board meetings.

Secondly, the timing of when the survey was given may have had an effect of the perceptions of the community members. Survey I was given during February 2023, which was later in the year than preferred. Ideally the surveys would have been given at the start of the school year and the end of the school year to maximize the opportunities to which the community had access, such as extracurriculars and communication tools. Survey II was given at the end of May 2023. The release data immediately followed a highly contentious school board preliminary election. While the time of the year was not an issue, the election results may have had an effect on some of the data, based on the responses provided.

Additionally, there was a lower response rate during Collection II which may have been a direct result of the numerous activities associated at the end of a school year. There were several events planned over the month of May, especially for families of seniors. It may have been beneficial to send a reminder out to families or to put a deadline on the initial information explaining the survey.

Thirdly, when initially planning the study it was decided that it would be beneficial to measure the rating of school culture and how it differed over that period of time. With the anonymity of the survey there was no way to know if the same respondents participated in both data collections. Because of that there is not a true measure of the change of perception of the school culture rating. Participants could have chosen to respond because they were happy or unhappy about something that had occurred with their child or with the district in general at the time they responded to the survey which may have skewed the results. It may have been beneficial to add an additional question to the second survey asking participants to indicate whether they

participated in the initial data collection for use to measure school culture more accurately.

Fourthly, there was not an opportunity to survey students to determine how they perceive school culture. As a focus group, it would have been beneficial to learn what students had to say to ensure the thoughts and opinions of the community members are in line with student responses. Due to the age of the student population it was not possible to add this layer of data to the study. With school culture directly affecting the stakeholder group the most, gathering their input would have provided a more representative answer. Teenagers oftentimes have different thoughts and opinions from their parents. Learning what they find to be important and/or not important would be helpful in any future planning the district may undertake.

Lastly, the literature review provided an overwhelming number of definitions for school culture. What one author identified as culture may not have been the same for the next three authors. Several components factored into culture and it is necessary to determine exactly what culture means to the district prior to generalizing the study results with previous literature. With that said, social media use and technology are relatively new when referring to school culture. This area of focus could provide additional clarity when conducting future research, especially as the use of both becomes more developed and clearly defined.

Financial Implications

Extracurricular opportunities cost a significant amount of money. This is money well spent on student interests and supports the value of teamwork, sportsmanship and integrity. The athletic's budget alone for the 2023-2024 school year totals \$495,493.00,

which is approximately 2% of the school districts' entire budget. That number does not include the cost projections for advisor positions for clubs and activities. While those numbers combined are not outrageous, adding more programming and extracurricular opportunities to those already in existence would have a significant impact on the district's budget.

Some of the more popular suggestions for additions to the current offerings included more sports teams: swimming, rifle, archery, soccer, and wrestling. With no pool in the district, no soccer field, and no wrestling mats the district would be required to make a substantial investment in order to get these potential new programs up and running. Other programming suggested by the survey participants revolved around evening opportunities. These included several areas where individuals would need to assume responsibility for and be in charge of the event. This entails ensuring staff is available to assist in the evening such as custodial personnel and school police officers. None of these activities come without a significant cost to the district.

However, some ideas presented by the survey participants are to elaborate on programming the district currently offers. For instance, one participant recommended having a multi-cultural day. Learning about different cultures already occurs in several courses, but turning this into a building-wide opportunity where culturally appropriate food and activities are offered would exponentially expand on the lesson. Another example is teaching students about more, and different, careers. The district began offering a career fair during the 2022-2023 school year. While this is a start to this process, the goal of the program is to continue to grow and show students there are more

opportunities available to them than those offered in Butler County, Pennsylvania. The district continues to look to improve upon current programming each year.

One specific suggestion asked for dances after athletic events. This is something the district would not need to fund as this type of event is traditionally sponsored by a club. The hard part would be finding a club to host the event and arranging the entertainment. Usually dances are chaperoned by teacher and parent volunteers, which again, would cost the district nothing additional as the building would be open and security would still be on duty. Another participant recommended providing more guest or special speakers to the student body. This idea can be easily completed by groups such as Student Council and even utilizing grant funding for such events. The one concern here would be the loss of instructional time in order to provide the opportunity. The district would need to weigh the pros and cons of both in order to determine if providing a program of this nature would benefit the student body and assist in affecting school culture.

All suggestions provided by the participants should be considered when examining the type of impact they could have on the student body and the surrounding communities. Sometimes an investment of time and money are more beneficial in the long run, even though the initial commitment of personnel and funding can be substantial.

Future Direction and Recommendations

If the pandemic showed us anything, it was the importance of establishing good communication and working as a cohesive unit proves to be highly effective.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the district, and every other district, to

modify their offerings and make changes in order to ensure the safety and security of students and staff members. Because of this, many things changed and few have returned to their pre-pandemic status. During this time, it was important to continue offering the students different programming opportunities, but it was not possible to invite families into the buildings to take part in those programs. This caused repercussions with families as community members wanted to be able to continue with pre-pandemic regulations, which unfortunately could not occur. A breakdown in the relationship between school and home occurred as a result. As we near what is hopefully the end of this period of time, it is essential that the district focus on repairing and rebuilding that relationship.

The district will be using the data compiled in this action research study to further enhance school culture. With the reduction in federal funding after COVID-19 and the decreasing enrollment of the district, it is necessary to examine current programming and determine if what is offered should continue to be offered in the future. For example, the competitive spirit team only has three participants registered for the 2023-2024 school year. Once a highly popular program with only the best, most talented students trying out, the decline in numbers over the last three years indicates that this may be a program which should no longer be offered due to lack of interest.

While this action research project provided a baseline for understanding the current perceived school culture, the district will continue to monitor the climate and make recommendations based upon the ongoing data. At this time, it is not possible to add new programming, but modifying and adapting those programs currently offered can be accomplished. Further changes could only be considered after evaluating the financial

climate of the district, as well as the student enrollment status and interest level. These factors will play a significant part in determining how the district moves forward.

One benefit, as a result of the pandemic, was the importance of technology and how it can be used for communication purposes. Everyone was forced to adapt to new methods of communication. Paperwork traveling back and forth in the child's backpack was no longer used and was considered to no longer be safe. Email, text messaging, telephone calls and social media became the primary methods used for spreading information as quickly as possible. Each method employed reached a target audience and assisted the district in communicating. Furthermore, the district was forced to ensure the website was up-to-date and that anything shared on social media was coming from the district owned Facebook and Twitter pages.

The data indicate that the district is currently meeting the needs of the community when examining communication methods. Based on the answers provided, there appears to be something that meets the needs of everyone in the district. In the 2022-2023 school year the district added a districtwide newsletter that was disseminated electronically in addition to utilizing one communication App, Class Dojo, for all teachers and students in grades K-6. Previously multiple platforms were used, which made it difficult for parents to keep track of when they had more than one student across the grade levels.

Communication is an aspect that will always be necessary and will continue to be examined for the most effective methods. Advances are made in technology all of the time and moving forward it will only benefit the district to continue to meet those needs and explore any new methods as they continue to develop.

Recommendations for Future Studies and Research

This study scrutinized how school culture is perceived by a variety of stakeholders within the Moniteau School District. The specially designed survey provided insight into the understanding of school culture and how it is affected by a variety of factors, such as: communication methods, extracurricular opportunities, support from various sub-groups, and what influences can affect school culture. This examination allowed the district to understand the role of school culture within the district and the reasons why it may be affected, either positively or negatively.

Future studies would benefit from focusing on the perspective of the student. Better insight and information can be gleaned from gathering the perspective of the students in the school building. As they face the day-to-day activities firsthand, it would be impactful to understand what they feel they need, or do not need, to enhance their learning environment. While the district is the center of the community, at least in this school district, the primary focus is and should be, on the students. Students are what drives the decision-making process and all efforts should be made to provide them with the best opportunities possible.

Furthermore, while this study did not focus on information gathered from the faculty and staff, it may be beneficial to have a study dedicated to understanding their perspective of school culture and how they feel it relates to a student's overall learning experience. Their awareness of school culture comes from a significantly different lens than parents, administrators, board members and community members. Oftentimes, teachers hear about something before it occurs and can provide information about an issue due to what they overhear in the hallways.

Another area that could be examined in more depth would be communication methods across a district. Asking parents to select a method of communication at the start of the school year and communicating in only that method would be interesting to study. The research could focus on which method of communication was preferred and how that method tracked based on student and/or parent participation at different events or activities. While this may be difficult to do, continuing to review and research preferential communication methods would allow districts to reach out only utilizing the preferred method so parents are not inundated with all manners of communication, such as emails, text messages and phone calls, all for the exact same reason.

These three topics could provide valuable information for understanding school culture across all different forums. The data gathered could help districts with both short and long-term planning, both financially and programmatically. Goals could be developed in the comprehensive plan that tie directly to school culture, based upon what the data indicate is important and should be a focus area. And, as trends continue to adapt and change over time, reexamining these three focus areas would prove beneficial for all district stakeholders.

Summary

This action research assisted in identifying perceptions of school culture using a variety of questions to ascertain the current school culture rating. All data gathered was done by using information voluntarily given through a survey by district stakeholders, which may have included: parents/guardians, district employees (teachers, support staff, administration), school board directors, and community members. The resulting data clarified the current perception of school culture and allowed the district to begin

planning for future endeavors, which may include, but are not limited to, adding extracurricular opportunities, adding evening programming for students and/or community members, among a variety of other recommendations.

The data revealed that the district stakeholder groups overwhelmingly feel that the school culture at Moniteau is positive, with support being given to student groups from the administration, as well as the faculty and staff. While improvements can always be made in every area examined, the overall result was that the district is on the right track when attempting to communicate with the community-at-large. The current methods employed by the district are reaching the stakeholders and the information is being shared via a platform they prefer to use.

The first step in continuing to make positive strides with school culture is to share the data gathered with the administrative team. Learning the perceived strengths and areas of improvement for the district lays the foundation for developing a successful learning environment with a positive school culture. This may include challenging current points of view and methods of communication. Additionally, this may force change, which is always an area of great resistance whether that change is for the betterment of the student population or district. While the administration may be the first step, the next step would be to highlight the areas of importance to the faculty and staff, as well as the school board members. These groups are directly involved in the planning and implementation of programming and would benefit greatly from understanding the views of the community.

Looking ahead to the new school year, plans are underway for new and exciting ways to involve more students beyond the current offerings. Teachers and administrators

have initiated steps to ensure more students are given opportunities they may find interesting or valuable. Communication with the community was established as a goal in the district comprehensive plan. This ensures that the district will continue to emphasize communication and make it a priority for the duration of the plan. It will be important for all district staff to maintain consistency when undergoing any proposed changes or recommendations. Should new programming be implemented, professional development may be necessary to assist with any misconceptions or concerns.

Finally, collaboration with the community is essential in continuing to establish a culture of respect and cohesiveness. Working together will be essential in ensuring that students are given the best and most appropriate opportunities in order for the district to prepare them for the challenges they may face in life. If it takes a village to raise a child and have that child be successful, a major component will be to maintain open lines of communication with key groups to provide input and feedback into changes and for any future plans.

Overall, the action research study answered many questions regarding the perceptions of school culture of the Moniteau School District. The study provided the opportunity for the community to voice concerns, but also provide suggestions for improvements and outline what they may feel is most important in terms of culture. Using this data for future planning purposes will assist the district in developing both short and long-term goals and approaching communication with the community in the most effective manner.

Further research in this topic can only benefit this district in making the most appropriate decisions with students in mind. Realigning the importance of a school-to-

home connection as a valuable commodity in the educational process which promotes positivity and connectedness proves the district is moving forward with the whole family in mind. By ensuring this connection occurs, a more positive environment is established and the school culture is viewed in a favorable light.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Survey Participant Disclosure Form

Survey Participant Disclosure

Introduction

I am conducting an action research study to investigate how engagement opportunities may have an impact on school culture and whether that engagement is influenced by social media. In this study you will be asked to answer questions regarding gender and alumni status. You will also answer questions related to school events you may have attended or your child(ren) may have participated in. Additionally, you will be asked about your communication preferences as well as your social media preferences, if any. Finally, you will be asked questions about your perceptions of school culture and whether you feel different groups of stakeholders support the student population.

Participation

Families of students of the Moniteau School District, as well as adults (aged 18 or order, not currently enrolled in the school district) who may not have a current child in this district have been selected as participants in this study. Participation in the survey is voluntary and will be collected via google form. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete and consists of a majority of multiple-choice questions with a couple of open-ended questions, if applicable.

Benefits

Benefits of this study are unknown, but may assist the district in the improvement of how to increase and foster student engagement. Results may have an impact on school culture.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

Confidentiality

All information provided in the survey answers will be kept anonymous and will not be personally identifiable when the data is presented. Participants may elect to not participate in the survey or to withdraw after they have begun the survey. Incomplete surveys will not be used for the study.

This study has received approval from Pennsylvania Western University's (formerly California University of Pennsylvania) Institutional Review Board and is completed as a requirement of the Doctor of Education in Educational Administration and Leadership program. This approval is effective 9/27/2022 and expires 9/26/2023. Please refer any additional questions to Dr. Todd Keruskin, Faculty Capstone Committee Chair at keruskin@pennwest.edu or Mrs. Aubrie Schnelle, Doctoral Student at (724) 637-2117 or sch6757@pennwest.edu.

By moving forward with the survey questions, you indicate you understand this disclosure form and consent to participate in the survey. Should you not wish to participate please do not go any further.

Appendix B

School Culture Survey

Beginning and End of the year Family/Community Resident Survey

1. Please list your gender:
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other
 - Prefer not to answer

2. Are you an alumnus of Moniteau?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Please list the number of current students you have in the district _____

4. Please list the grade level(s) of your student(s): (Select all that apply)
 - K
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9
 - 10
 - 11
 - 12

5. Do you have any children who are alumni of Moniteau?
 - Yes
 - No
 1. If yes, how many? _____
 2. What year(s) did they graduate? _____

6. Have you attended events at the school in previous years?
 - Yes

- No
 1. If yes, what is your reason (Select all that apply)
 1. My child participates in the event(s)
 2. I enjoy attending school events
 3. Other _____
7. What type of events have you attended at the school? (Select all that apply)
- Athletic event
 - School musical
 - Band concert
 - Choir concert
 - Talent show
 - Variety show
 - School board meeting
 - Committee meeting
 - Assembly
 - Graduation ceremony
 - Other, please list _____
8. How do you hear about the events at the school? (Select all that apply)
- My student
 - All call from the school
 - Email from the school
 - Text message from the school
 - School website
 - Social media post
 - Local newspaper(s)
 - Other parent/community member
 - Other, please list _____
9. What is your preferred method of receiving information from the school?
- Your child
 - Email
 - Text message
 - Phone call
 - Website
 - Letter mailed home
 - Social media post
 - Local newspaper(s)

- Other: _____
10. Are there other events you wish the school offered for your student (events would be considered non-educational opportunities)?
- Yes
 - No
 - Unknown
1. If yes, what would you like to see _____
11. Do you feel there are enough events offered for parents/community members?
- Yes
 - No
 - Unknown
1. If no, what would you like to see _____
12. Do you feel school culture is important?
- Yes
 - No
 - Unknown
13. How supportive do you feel the faculty and staff is of the student population?
- Strongly supportive
 - Somewhat supportive
 - Minimally supportive
 - Not supportive
14. How supportive do you feel the administration is of the student population?
- Strongly supportive
 - Somewhat supportive
 - Minimally supportive
 - Not supportive
15. Please rate the current school culture at Moniteau:
- Strongly positive
 - Positive
 - Neutral (neither positive nor negative)
 - Negative
 - Strongly negative
16. What one thing has the greatest impact on school culture?
- Faculty and staff involvement

- Student involvement
 - Community involvement
 - Other _____
-

17. List one thing that positively impacts school culture?

18. List one thing that negatively impacts school culture?

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board
250 University Avenue
California, PA 15419
instreviewboard@calu.edu
Melissa Sovak, Ph.D.

Dear Aubrie,

Please consider this email as official notification that your proposal titled "An Action Research Study Examining the Perceptions of School Culture by District Residents as Measured by Engagement Opportunities" (Proposal #PW22-028) has been approved by the PennWest Institutional Review Board as amended with the following stipulations:

Is "district resident" the correct terminology to use within the research questions if the sample is solicited from those actively enrolled with Skylert? Any person who lives within the geographic region would technically be a "district resident". It's noted that there may be respondents who do not have an active student in the district later within the document. A better definition upfront will add clarity to the research.

Q15-18 – watch the wording. "If you could" is unnecessary and allows for the respondent to raise the response I can't. "Please rate the school culture at Moniteau:", "What has the greatest impact on school culture?", "What is one positive impact on school culture?", "What is one negative impact on school culture?" are all sufficient and direct.

Once you have completed the above request you may immediately begin data collection. You do not need to wait for further IRB approval. At your earliest convenience, you must forward a copy of the changes for the Board's records.

The effective date of the approval is 9/27/2022 and the expiration date is 9/26/2022. These dates must appear on the consent form.

Please note that Federal Policy requires that you notify the IRB promptly regarding any of the following:

- (1) Any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented)
- (2) Any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects
- (3) Any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).
- (4) To continue your research beyond the approval expiration date of 9/26/2022 you must file additional information to be considered for continuing review. Please

contact instreviewboard@pennwest.edu. Please notify the Board when data collection is complete.

Regards,
Melissa Sovak, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix D**Board Approval Letter**

July 11, 2022

329 Muddy Creek Dr.
Butler, PA 16001

Dear Mrs. Aubric Schnelle:

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter of support for your doctoral capstone project entitled, "An Action Research Study Examining the Perceptions of School Culture in Grades 8–12 by Utilizing Engagement Opportunities for Students." This proposed research project has the potential to provide significant and valuable information for the Moniteau School District, especially at the secondary level.

Not only will this project relay the perceptions this identified group of students has regarding the culture within their school, but it can also provide an in-depth analysis of how extra-curricular activities and other factors (i.e. delivery of instruction, delivery of programs, peer relationships, faculty and administration interactions, etc.) may affect the culture of the school. This project may also discover factors that disrupt the culture of the school.

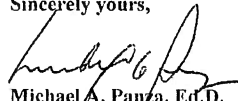
Ultimately, this action research study will afford the district the opportunity to gain the students' perspective on their educational experiences and be able to plan accordingly to address the concerns presented.

I have thoroughly reviewed the project proposal and understand the following related to participation of all parties:

- Student participation will involve the completion of two surveys (one at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year and a follow-up survey prior to the end of this school year).
- Participation on the part of the students is voluntary and a student may elect to withdraw from participation at any time.
- Parents/guardians will be afforded the opportunity to review the survey and elect for their children not to participate in this research project.
- All data will be kept strictly confidential via electronic files and no identification of participants will be utilized.
- Potential risks to the participants are minimal and should not be greater than any of those encountered in daily life activities.

Please accept this letter as my formal consent and complete support of the district's participation in this proposed research project. We wish you best of luck as you continue and look forward to reviewing your results.

Sincerely yours,



Michael A. Panza, Ed.D.
President, Moniteau School Board

Appendix E

School Culture Survey Email

Aubrie Schnelle <aschnelle@moniteau.org>Tue, Feb
14, 6:33 PM

to ASCHNELLE

Good evening,

School culture is something every school district hopes is viewed in a positive light. All district stakeholders (students, staff, community members, etc...) have a role to play in school culture. With the permission of the Moniteau School District Board of Directors and the Institutional Review Board at Pennsylvania Western University (formerly California University of Pennsylvania) the focus area of my doctoral project is school culture, specifically as viewed through the lens of community stakeholders. The attached survey is comprised of eighteen questions that will help to examine how school culture is viewed from Moniteau's community stakeholders. The data collected from this survey will be used not only to complete the requirements of the doctoral degree, but to assist the district in this area in the future. The information listed below will address questions you may have. The link to the survey is included at the end of this email. Thank you for your time and have a wonderful evening.

Survey Participant DisclosureIntroduction

I am conducting an action research study to investigate how engagement opportunities may have an impact on school culture and whether that engagement is influenced by social media. In this study you will be asked to answer questions regarding gender and alumni status. You will also answer questions related to school events you may have attended or your child(ren) may have participated in. Additionally, you will be asked about your communication preferences as well as your social media preferences, if any. Finally, you will be asked questions about your perceptions of school culture and whether you feel different groups of stakeholders support the student population.

Participation

Families of students of the Moniteau School District, as well as adults (aged 18 or older, not currently enrolled in the school district) who may not have a current child in this district have been selected as participants in this study. Participation in the survey is voluntary and will be collected via google form. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete and consists of a majority of multiple-choice questions with a couple of open-ended questions, if applicable.

Benefits

Benefits of this study are unknown, but may assist the district in the improvement of how

to increase and foster student engagement. Results may have an impact on school culture.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

Confidentiality

All information provided in the survey answers will be kept anonymous and will not be personally identifiable when the data is presented. Participants may elect to not participate in the survey or to withdraw after they have begun the survey. Incomplete surveys will not be used for the study.

This study has received approval from Pennsylvania Western University's (formerly California University of Pennsylvania) Institutional Review Board and is completed as a requirement of the Doctor of Education in Educational Administration and Leadership program. This approval is effective 9/27/2022 and expires 9/26/2023. Please refer any additional questions to Dr. Todd Keruskin, Faculty Capstone Committee Chair at keruskin@pennwest.edu or Mrs. Aubrie Schnelle, Doctoral Student at (724) 637-2117 or sch6757@pennwest.edu.

By moving forward with the survey questions, you indicate you understand this disclosure form and consent to participate in the survey. Should you not wish to participate please do not go any further.

Perceptions of School Culture Survey

Sincerely,
Aubrie Schnelle
Superintendent of Schools
Moniteau School District