

Title: A Study of Teacher Perceptions in High and Low Achieving Schools

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Frequently, school improvement efforts are not rooted in practice because they conflict with the deeply held perceptual beliefs that limit people to familiar ways of thinking and acting. In order to facilitate the change process, school leaders need to understand the role that teachers' perceptions and attitudes have on efforts toward school improvement. This study explores teacher perceptions in schools with high and low student achievement

A survey, focused on nine effective schools indicators, was used to determine teachers' perceptions in schools with high and low student achievement. The survey consisted of a demographic section identifying the variables of teaching assignment, gender, years of service, and highest level of education attained, and the general survey focused on the nine effectiveness indicators present in effective schools. Teachers from six schools were selected for the study from elementary schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania that scored above or below their Similar Schools Score Band on the 2001 statewide Pennsylvania System of School Assessment Test.

Two-way Anova and Chi-square analysis were conducted on the survey data. Findings determined that demographic variables had a significant main effect by achievement in all sub-scales but no main effect by demographic variable or interaction. Chi-square analysis of the 110 survey statements revealed a significant difference in 82 of the 110 statements ($p < .05$) between teacher perceptions in high and low achieving schools. The study found that teachers' perceptions differ considerably in schools with high vs. low student achievement. Of the nine

effectiveness indicators examined, shared decision-making, clear goals, and a positive school climate, showed the largest significant difference in attitudes between high and low groups. The time on task, parent involvement and an articulated curriculum sub-scales had the lowest difference between groups.

In conclusion, it is suggested that successful change and implementing improvement initiatives lie in understanding the strength and dynamic interplay of teacher perceptions and attitudes within a school. Clearly articulated goals, collaborative involvement in decision-making and an orderly, caring environment, relate to higher student achievement.