PROJECT TITLE:
KEY STRATEGIES TO RAISE TEACHER MORALE AND IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

HOST COUNTRY:
USA

HOME COUNTRY:
SOUTH AFRICA
1. ABSTRACT

Any organisation that serves people or is concerned with satisfying the needs of people must have an environment in which the workers feel a certain pride in belonging to that institution. In order to get maximum efficiency and productivity out of the workers, many factors must be considered. Some of these are job security, working conditions, salary and working hours. These factors and more contribute to the morale of the workers. Morale is defined as: “The state of the spirit of a person or group as exhibited by confidence, cheerfulness, discipline, and willingness to perform assigned tasks.”

In schools the morale of teachers is an important factor to ensure that teachers give of their best at all times so that students receive the best possible education. Young minds are easily influenced and affected by what they see and learn. Creating a positive school climate is an added factor that can help schools focus on providing a well-rounded educational programme in which teachers and students are willing participants. This paper examines the factors that affect teacher morale and attempts to find key strategies to raise morale and improve school climate.

My research commenced in South Africa, my home country, where I conducted a survey amongst teachers from different schools in order to determine some of the factors that affect teacher morale. My research in the USA has been enriched by a variety of resources as listed below.

- Visits to schools in Montgomery County, Baltimore, Howard County, New York, Arundel and San Francisco.
- Attending the Character Education Forum in San Francisco, California.
• Interactions with teachers and lecturers in courses which I audited at the University of Maryland. The two courses were “Teaching as a Profession” by Dr D Imig and “Teaching and Learning Maths in Secondary Schools” by Dr A Brantlinger.

• Responses to surveys and questionnaires through discussions and online responses

• Books by experts on Character Development

• Relevant articles from online Magazines: Edutopia and Education week.

• Fulbright alumni and colleagues.

• Attending Webinars:” Motivating Reluctant learners: and “The Well Balanced Teacher”

• Video recordings of interviews.

I have used the above resources to compile a booklet entitled “Strategies to Improve Teacher Morale and School Climate”. Some of the strategies that are included in this booklet are: How to provide intrinsic motivation in the classroom; Strategies for Principals; and Strategies for Teachers. Intrinsic motivation discusses how to motivate students from within instead of depending on external rewards. Strategies for Principals include modelling a vision for excellence, breathing life into Professional Development and Providing Incentives for Teachers. Strategies for Teachers include Designing a safe well-managed and friendly Classroom environment, How to include students in creating rules, norms, routines and consequences and Creating a variety of communication channels.

For the purpose of this paper, however, I have chosen to focus on the information gleaned from my school visits and the Character Education Forum. My research has helped me find many solutions and strategies, some of which are obvious but rarely practised. From my school visits I was able to get visible confirmation that strong leadership, coupled with
clear guidelines, rules, consequences and loving support, are key considerations for raising
teacher morale and improving school climate.

From attending the Character Education Forum and my visit to the Pleasanton School
District in San Francisco, California, I was introduced to Character Education. This is a
method of teaching which focuses on infusing character in every aspect of the curriculum,
forcing students to question their actions in a loving and caring manner. In this way
students take responsibility for their actions, examine how their behaviour affects others
and find ways to help others in need. Glowing reports from District Superintendents,
Administrators and teachers from 3 schools and community leaders in the Pleasanton
School District, on how Character Education helped to create a positive and enjoyable
school climate, have convinced me that this could be a key strategy to improve Teacher
Morale. The teachers at Harvest Park Middle School were testimony to this, judging from
the positive atmosphere in their classrooms as well as their general sense of contentment.

2. INTRODUCTION:

Teacher morale impacts directly on delivery of lessons, teacher effectiveness and
leadership, student attitudes, behaviour and discipline, as well as student performance.
Key to improving Teacher Morale is creating a positive school climate that reflects the
physical and psychological aspects of the school which are more susceptible to change and
which provide the preconditions necessary for teaching and learning to take place. I
believe that, when this is achieved, reforms in curriculum, teaching standards, teacher
evaluation and learner assessments can become successful and meaningful.

Over the last 10 years or more there has been a steady decline in teacher morale in many
public schools in South Africa, which has led to many teachers adopting an apathetic
attitude to their profession. Even the most skilled teachers find it increasingly difficult to
maintain standards and give off their best. Undisciplined learners, heavy workloads, violence at school, lack of parental and management support and reduced chances of promotion are just a few of the reasons for this.

Teachers are responsible for building a nation. Therefore schools should be happy places where students are willing participants in the learning process and teachers are inspiring and enthusiastic leaders. For this to happen, teacher morale and school climate deserve greater attention. With this in mind I have chosen to use the results of my survey at home and from other researchers to find strategies to raise teacher morale and improve school climate.

3. **KEY CAUSES OF LOW MORALE**

The results of a survey to my fellow colleagues at home provided me with many causes of low morale which I have grouped under the following headings. These causes have provided me with some direction in finding appropriate strategies to improve morale.

3.1 **Student –related problems:**

These included poor discipline, laziness, lack of work ethics, disrespect of teachers and school rules, late-coming, high absenteeism and absconding.

3.2 **Academic Instruction and curriculum:**

Teachers complained that the focus is mainly academic and not holistic; maintenance of records and assessment tasks is time-consuming; deteriorating numeracy and literacy skills impedes progress; drop in pass requirements lowers standards; lack of professional development and collaboration at school level reduces teacher confidence; they needed to be consulted for input in syllabus changes.
3.3 Lack of support:
Inadequate support from Management, peers, subject advisors, parents and community; few incentives for teachers; little improvement in classroom management skills.

3.4 Administrative issues:
These include large class sizes, poor salaries when compared with the private sector, nepotism and lack of merit in the appointment to senior posts, inequity in teaching loads between management and staff.

3.5 Relationship problems:
Relationship issues included professional jealousy; apathy of colleagues; and lack of unity amongst educators.

4. FINDINGS BY OTHER RESEARCHERS
Other researchers confirm that the issue of teacher morale is not restricted to any one country but is a global issue that bears many similarities.

4.1 Sandra Nichols, a Speech and Language Specialist for Santa Cruz City Schools says: “Teachers suffer from low morale due in part to the low-pay-high-cost-of-living gap. Decisions handed from the top down leave teachers feeling more like trainers than educators. Teaching in low performing schools should be a rewarding experience, yet these schools are labelled failures. The emphasis placed on test scores makes creativity and critical thinking afterthoughts at best.”

4.2 Noella Mackenzie of Charles Sturt University in Australia says: “A decline over the past 30 years in the morale of teachers is identified within the literature, along with recognition of teaching having become an increasingly more demanding profession. The drop in morale has been accompanied by a shift in public attitude towards education and a suggestion that education in Australia is losing its place on ‘the international comparison ladder’ (Kelly 2000, p.9)…….. Numerous causes for low teacher morale have been
suggested: poor status in the community; poor salaries (relative to other professions); poor student behaviour; excessive workload; poor leadership; poor working conditions; and increasing government accountability measures.”

4.3 Another relationship that has been advanced by researchers is the link between school culture and teacher morale. Miller (1981) maintained that student learning and teacher morale were related to a positive school culture that was characterized by respect, shared decision making, communication, and administrative support.

4.4 In the study conducted by Huysman (2007), teacher morale was low because the school culture was embedded with inequities that emanated from the distribution of power. Moreover, the teachers in this study outlined lack of recognition, company policies, advancement, co-worker relations, and salaries as factors that caused an unproductive school culture.

4.5 A report (by National Center for Education Statistics 1997) on job satisfaction among American teachers identified "more administrative support and leadership, good student behaviour, a positive school atmosphere, and teacher autonomy" as working conditions associated with higher teacher satisfaction. The study also found that "teachers in any school setting who receive a great deal of parental support are more satisfied than teachers who do not."

5. **SCHOOL VISITS AND INTERVIEWS**

5.1 I visited many schools from Elementary to High School in many districts and counties and/or interviewed Administrators and teachers. These are listed below:
My weekly visits to Montgomery Blair High School put me in contact with 2 key personnel who provided useful strategies for improving morale. I interviewed two Assistant Principals, Dr A. Coleman and Mr D. Cauley and the transcripts of these interviews are included as Appendices. These were very productive interviews and Dr Coleman and Mr Cauley are truly inspirational and motivating leaders who the staff and students look up to with respect. They lead by example and are very visible in the school. They obviously love their jobs and both are, in my opinion, role models for other Principals and Assistant Principals. If all schools had leaders like them teacher morale would be very high.
5.3 From my school visits I was able to elicit the following strategies which could be used to raise teacher morale and improve school climate:

- Guidance Counsellors (who have been removed from Public schools in South Africa) are a necessary part of schools as they track student performance, identify special needs students and provide career and emotional support for students. Having advanced computerised software which is able to track the progress, attendance and behaviour of any student at any given time, can be a real advantage. In most schools which have this system, the responsibility of tracking students online lies with Counsellors and Administrators. This keeps students focused and reduces disciplinary problems as students will know that their performance is related to their ability to pass 12th grade.

- In order to ensure parents are informed and updated on a daily basis about their child’s behaviour and performance, a sophisticated Online Programme is used to keep parents “in the loop”. This virtual meeting with parents ensures that every parent is aware of his/her child’s progress. Training is provided by the school to parents who cannot use the programme. Parents who do not have computers at home have the option of viewing this information at work or at internet café’s.

- Another method of ensuring good discipline is to conduct an orientation with students at the beginning of each year. At this forum Administrators lay down school expectations for students and spell out the consequences of not conforming to these. Staff and Administration have to follow through at all times. These expectations and consequences are also reinforced in the Student and Parent Handbooks. One of the possible consequences for breaching any aspect of this code of conduct is loss of credits. Teachers and Administrators take this very seriously and parents are called in if necessary. In serious cases students are sent home and may only return with their
parents in order to be re-instated. While corporal punishment cannot be administered, there are other forms of punitive measures like detention after school or during breaks, by administrators. Students cannot use the excuse of “no transport home” if detention is during breaks. With this kind of pressure, students very rarely present serious discipline problems. While many schools in South Africa may claim that this method of discipline has been tried with little success, I have seen that it works when there is reinforcement at all levels.

- The old system of promoting students to the next grade despite failing one or two subjects is not beneficial to students as they struggle with that subject in the next grade. The system of Block Scheduling provides a solution to this. With block scheduling, students may progress to the next grade level of subjects they pass but have to repeat subjects that they fail until they pass them. This encourages a better work ethic and keeps the student focussed. It also reduces the level of frustration of teachers who have to teach students whose cognitive knowledge of the subject matter is poor.

- The offering of electives, Advanced Placement and Honours courses, caters for the varied aptitudes of students and provides an outlet for these students to express their unique abilities and talents. Advanced Placement (AP) and Honours classes are not compulsory but cater for the above average students. Both teachers and students are highly motivated in these classes. Electives are usually fun subjects that students can take. Students get extra credits for these subjects. At Montgomery Blair I spoke to students who took the Year book class and some who took the Newspaper Class as electives. Each of these classes has their own student leaders who direct all activities. Both these classes were busy preparing either the Yearbook or the Monthly Newspaper, which were of excellent standard. These classes are simply monitored by
teachers. Electives lessen the workload of teachers while providing Leadership opportunities for students. When students are given opportunities to use their creative talents, they blossom and this reduces the amount of disciplinary problems that teachers have to deal with. If time cannot be allocated for electives within the daily time table, then it could be allocated during breaks or after school.

- Schools should be able to cater for gifted students who, if not given the correct attention, can become very disruptive or lose interest. In order to cater for such children many schools have the Magnet and CAP (Cultural and Arts Programme) components added to their curriculum.

- Public schools in the USA promote inclusive education. Slow or special needs students are catered for in a normal class by bringing in Para–educators. Teacher aides are added to classes with large numbers of slow learners. Counsellors draw up an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for special-needs students to be successful. In this way teachers can focus, in the main, on pitching their lessons at the average student’s pace. Students of different learning abilities will thus be able to get the correct stimulation and assistance they need. Related to this is the idea of having an Administrator in charge of a grade, who creates a plan of action to provide support to students who struggle with their subjects. Struggling students in the 12th grade at Montgomery Blair are given academic support from the Assistant Principal and Counsellor. Twice a week they are called in to review their progress and given extra help to assist them to pass. Reducing class size, where there are many special-needs students, also helps to maintain discipline, reduce marking and provide valuable time for greater interaction between teacher and student. These strategies will reduce teacher stress while creating an environment where learning becomes meaningful.
• The School Leadership team should meet once a week with the Administrative team to plan and discuss issues of importance and to provide assistance for teachers. New teachers need a lot of support while older teachers may need less support. At Montgomery Blair, new teachers are mentored by senior teachers and consulting teachers. They are constantly given support and monitored by the Head of Department. If a new teacher makes very little progress then he/she may be given a probationary period accompanied by further support to try to reach the required standard. The last resort to remove a teacher from the system will only be effected after many attempts to provide assistance and guidance have failed. The whole process is documented so that teachers are aware that the process is fair. Providing support in this manner ensures that new teachers grow professionally and become stronger teachers. Teacher self-confidence is an important factor to raise morale.

• PLC’s are Professional Learning Communities formed by teachers who teach the same subject. They meet at least once a month to share best practices, lesson plans and methodologies. In this way they give support to each other. This improves peer relationships. Teachers are also given one Planning period and one IRA (Instructional Related Activity) period (for Professional development) per day in some schools. As a result, they are able to catch up on marking and planning. Making such time available for teachers shows them that they are valued.

• Teachers and administrators in the US are evaluated every 3 to 5 years depending on their number of years of experience. This is done to maintain tenure and allows for professional growth of the teacher and Administrator. It encourages them to participate actively in professional development initiatives in order to meet standards. Teachers are encouraged to take extra classes at Universities as the increased qualification leads to increase in salary. These courses are subsidised up to 60% by
the State. This increase in knowledge seems to be linked to greater professional status and self-esteem.

- While Administrators do not teach, they are very involved in maintaining discipline, making class visits and providing feedback on a regular basis as well as providing support for staff. When teachers see that Administrators are busy people who also care, then the issue of inequity between staff and administration has no justification.

- At Montgomery Blair as well as many of the other schools listed above, administrators acknowledge the good work done by their staff by means of “Thank You” notes. They are caring and nurturing and show compassion, understanding and respect when dealing with teachers. Many Principals offer incentives like providing Awards for those who go above and beyond the call of duty, in staff memos and during a special celebration portion of each month's staff meeting. Others provide opportunities for Leadership development and staff breakfasts to bridge gaps and strengthen relationships.

- Collaboration and community problem-solving is another idea that helps to bridge the gap between Administration and staff. By developing action plans with everyone and asking for suggestions and recommendations teachers will feel that they are part of the process and can take ownership of the decision-making process. This is called “No Fault Decision Making” and is good for morale.

6. **CHARACTER EDUCATION:**

Character Education is the intentional effort to develop in young people core ethical and performance values that are widely affirmed across all cultures. Young minds are easily influenced by the world around them. Children learn from what they see, hear and experience. If the learning environment is one which constantly inculcates positive behaviour through value based learning, then the seeds of character education will be sown. Educators in many schools across the USA have successfully used Character
Education to transform their schools. Character Schools reinforce values in special lessons or throughout the curriculum. Posters on Character traits and their meaning are displayed throughout the school. Student Forums are a means to improve student-student and student-teacher relationships. Students are given a voice and an opportunity to brainstorm and provide solutions to discipline and other problems in schools. Thus students become partners in the School Improvement Plan. Service Learning integrates meaningful community service, engaging students in activities to serve the underprivileged, with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience. It teaches civic responsibility, and strengthens communities.

Bombarded with this positive environment students are constantly reminded to check their words, actions, thoughts, character and feelings. The inevitable result is good discipline. Since poor discipline is one of the chief causes of low teacher morale, character education may be one of the solutions that schools need to improve morale. The ultimate goal of Character Education is to create honest, ethical, diligent and caring citizens who will help to improve our communities, nation and the world. To be effective, Character Education must involve active engagement with families and community members and must permeate the school climate and curriculum.

I attended the National Forum on Character Education in San Francisco, California from the 19-22 October 2011. The presenters were teachers, students, Administrators, Superintendents of Education, community leaders and other Educationists who were all involved in implementing Character Education at some level. They spoke passionately about how Character Education positively changed the ethos of their schools and improved school culture, increased achievement for all learners, helped to develop global citizens, restored civility, prevented antisocial and unhealthy behaviours, and
improved job satisfaction and retention among teachers. Two conference ideas that impressed me were Student Forums and Service Learning, which I have explained above.

Part of the conference programme included a site visit to the Harvest Park Middle School in the Pleasanton School District. Our meeting with representatives and Administrators from Harvest Park Middle School and the nearby Elementary and High Schools proved to be most enlightening. The District Superintendent, Principals, teachers and student representative of Amador High School spoke proudly of their united efforts as a school district, together with the local community, to make Character Education a way of school life. This was evident in the neatness of the school, the obvious pride in their school shown by the children who were our “Tour Guides” and the very warm and happy relationship between students and their teachers. Character Education is emphasised by the following slogans:

“The Patriot Path:” at Harvest Park Middle School and “The Amador Way” at Amador High School which focus on the choice to make decisions on discipline issues. “Project Wisdom - Make it a great day or not – the choice is yours” is the slogan at the Elementary School.

Many Character Education Schools use acronyms for the Character traits the school emphasises. The Pleasanton District uses CHRRIS for Compassion, Honesty, Respect, Responsibility, Integrity and Self-confidence. Arundel High School uses PRIDE which stands for Positive, Responsible, Involved, Diligent and Efficient. Riverdale High School uses CARE which stands for Children Aware of Riverdale Ethics. In this way students and teachers take pride and ownership of the Character Education programme and this creates a very harmonious relationship between them.
THE 11 PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

The Character Education Partnership (CEP), which has its headquarters in Washington, DC, has formulated 11 principles as a cornerstone of their philosophy on how best to develop and implement high quality character education. The 11 principles define excellence in character education and serve as guideposts for schools that wish to implement this programme. Below is a list of the 11 Principles. I have included examples from specific schools to illustrate the positive results they have achieved with Character Education.

THE 11 PRINCIPLES OF THE CHARACTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP:

6.1 THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY PROMOTES CORE ETHICAL AND PERFORMANCE VALUES AS THE FOUNDATION OF GOOD CHARACTER.

At Babylon Memorial Grade School in New York, the character education message is visible everywhere: in its mission and belief statements, class constitutions, faculty and PTA meetings and Home-school Character Connection exercises. The media centre is the hub for character education and brings the core values to life through morning meetings, character-focused lessons, cross grade buddy programmes and grade level service projects.
6.2 THE SCHOOL DEFINES “CHARACTER” COMPREHENSIVELY TO INCLUDE THINKING, FEELING AND DOING.

Francis Howell Middle School in Missouri restructured the school day to make time for Character Connection classes. Mixed grade levels meet for 20 minutes daily and help one another to understand, internalise and practise the core values. Activities include writing character goals, peer-tutoring, and helping or expressing appreciation for particular groups within the school like bringing cakes for cafeteria workers and serving custodians hot chocolate while

6.3 THE SCHOOL USES A COMPREHENSIVE, INTENTIONAL AND PROACTIVE APPROACH TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

In Peter’s Township School District in Pennsylvania the core values are embedded throughout the culture and curriculum of all the district’s schools e.g. Core values are woven into the literacy curriculum to reflect on the values and on issues of character such as discrimination, patriotism and moral courage.

6.4 THE SCHOOL CREATES A CARING COMMUNITY.

Rosa International MS teachers kids to care and put that caring into action through a multitude of service learning projects. Students begin each day in Advisory where they get to know each other as they talk through issues and plan service projects. School culture stresses caring and acceptance, both at school and for those around the world.
6.5 THE SCHOOL PROVIDES STUDENTS WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORAL ACTION

Alta S Leary ES students engage in service as an extension of topics they learn about in class. In a 2nd grade class, students respond to a reading assignment about Haiti by raising funds to donate 400 pounds of beans and rice to the people in need there.

6.6 THE SCHOOL OFFERS A MEANINGFUL AND CHALLENGING ACADEMIC CURRICULUM THAT RESPECTS ALL LEARNERS, DEvelops their CHARACTER AND HELPS THEM TO SUCCEED.

Academic rigor, a character-based curriculum and a renewed emphasis on performance values helped to transform Waterloo MS from the bottom to a high performing school that is a model to others. Students set academic goals and their progress is monitored.

6.7 THE SCHOOL FOSTERS STUDENTS’ SELF-MOTIVATION.

Students at Hinsdale Central High School have initiated numerous programs themselves eg in “Break down the walls” students combat bullying and harassment through original skits that address discrimination issues before their peers and at other schools.
6.8  THE SCHOOL STAFF IS AN ETHICAL LEARNING COMMUNITY THAT SHARES RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION AND ADHERES TO THE SAME CORE VALUES THAT GUIDE THE STUDENTS

Col. John Robinson School has a program called “Peace-It-Together” monitored by staff and parents. Teachers model cooperation and respect for their students on a daily basis. Staff members say they enjoy coming to work each day because of the many positive relationships they experience.

6.9  THE SCHOOL FOSTERS SHARED LEADERSHIP AND LONG RANGE SUPPORT OF THE CHARACTER EDUCATION INITIATIVE.

The Lindbergh School District was named a District of Character in 2008. It promotes Professional Learning Communities in each of its schools for teachers to share ideas on academic, character and leadership objectives.

6.10  THE SCHOOL ENGAGES FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS PARTNERS IN THE CHARACTER-BUILDING EFFORT.

Wilton Manors ES has high parental involvement. The school hosts a variety of parent workshops and has a growing number of community partnerships with the larger community.
6.11 THE SCHOOL REGULARLY ASSESSES ITS CULTURE AND CLIMATE, THE FUNCTIONING OF ITS STAFF AS CHARACTER EDUCATORS, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH ITS STUDENTS MANIFEST GOOD CHARACTER.

Julian ES surveys all parents regularly and makes a special effort to reach out to and listen to its minority families. There is continuous improvement in achievement and attendance of all students while discipline actions continue to decrease.

7. OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE USA

7.1 The idea of probing and finding ways to improving teacher morale stemmed from my own experiences and disillusionments as an educator with many years of teaching experience. Before I left for the USA I was interviewed by the Independent on Saturday Newspaper in South Africa, about my reasons for selecting this topic and what I hoped to achieve. Many teachers and readers supported my views and were excited about what I was going to bring back. However one educationist disagreed with me about our huge workload and salary. He believed that teachers in South Africa are not overworked and underpaid.

7.2 My observations from the schools that I have visited in the USA have not only confirmed my views but also highlighted some very stark differences between the South African and American Educational systems. I visited many schools in different counties, each with its own curriculums, standards and norms for teachers. This was an immediate difference as it gave school districts autonomy in the design of their curriculum and the hiring and firing of teachers. In many of the schools I
visited the teachers had very little time to sit and talk to me, even during their lunch breaks. The concept of “Teaching to the Tests” to ensure that every student passes the State-wide tests puts a huge pressure on teachers. They spend many hours testing, re-teaching and re-testing to raise the test scores and improve their school rating. Low rated schools who consistently perform poorly with no improvement run the risk of closing down. This is something new to me and is unheard of in South Africa. I tend to disagree with this practice as this way of teaching has become a form of drill rather than a stimulating interaction between teacher and student.

7.3 Differences will always exist no matter where you are in the world. However, despite how different or difficult our problems are, if there is support, nothing is insurmountable. The support structures in terms of discipline, mentoring, professional development, technology and collaboration that I observed in the schools I visited, was key to their success and high teacher morale. Also, the wide range of subjects available and the different levels at which they could be taken, depending on the ability of the student, and the offering of electives, catered for all kinds of students and made inclusive and gifted education very possible within the same school. Of course, the addition of teacher aides and para-assistants to the staff, is key to the success of this initiative.

7.4 Most schools do not require high fences as the school security is very strong and provides a safe and caring environment for learning to take place. Students are also very aware of the expectations of the school and the consequences of any misdemeanour, so this minimises severe violations of the code of conduct and reduces disciplinary problems. This is reinforced by a very strong Management or Administration team who follow through on school rules and disciplinary procedures.
7.5 Guidance counsellors play a vital role in maintaining discipline as well as providing career guidance, ensuring that students and parents are focussed. Students need counsellors to guide them as teachers are not professionally qualified to perform this task and teachers can certainly use the extra time to focus on educational issues.

7.6 The use of technology to inform and involve parents and ensure parental support is another key factor in providing a good school climate. Using the correct software, parents can be kept in daily contact with their child’s progress and so early signs of problems can be quickly resolved.

7.7 Character Education provides a new and refreshing perspective to improve school climate, provide values-based education and create an atmosphere of caring and understanding. When values are entrenched within the curriculum and extra-curricular activities of a school, students are able to appreciate their peers, their teachers, their community and their environment. The concept of building character at every step, not only eliminates disruptive and undisciplined behavioural problems, but ensures that students become sensitive to the needs of others and take ownership for their education. They emerge educated with high morals and values which can only augur well for society and the future. The bonus is that academic excellence is not lost in the process and cost is not an issue. The only criterion necessary to ensure such a programme succeeds is commitment on the part of all stakeholders.

8. **FUTURE PLANS**

In order to continue this programme which I have started I have decided to make some changes and formulate new plans when I return home. I would like to meet with officials from the Department of Education and discuss this project and its outcomes with them, in the hope that they will support my mission to address school Principals and teachers about the need to improve morale and the ways in which this
can be achieved. I will then take that a step forward and conduct small scale training workshops with selected teachers and administrators who will then be used to train and educate others. I plan to use Teacher newsletters to advertise my plans. I would also like to create online teacher communities to provide a platform for teachers to discuss their concerns and offer solutions and feedback. Lastly, I want to create a blog to advertise what I will be doing as well as to offer strategies that are successfully implemented.

9. CONCLUSION
Any venture that seeks to bring about change must have the backing, commitment and support of the very people who the change is going to affect. If teacher morale is to be raised and school climate improved then the people that must bring about this change are the teachers, administrators, students, parents and the school community. The strategies discussed above, while providing solutions to the problems of low morale and poor school climate, require the commitment and obligation of all stakeholders to ensure that they work. Teachers and students must be willing to embrace new ideas and methodologies and become collaborators in modelling a vision for excellence. They must take full ownership of any changes and make every effort to ensure that success is the end result. The ripple effect created will impact on providing the best possible education for our children.

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11.5 Noella Mackenzie: Charles Sturt University- Australia- research paper (pdf) – Teacher Morale – more complex than we think.

11.6 Mike Anderson: The Well-Balanced Teacher Webinar **September 29, 2010**.

11.7 Sandra Nichols: Low pay, lack of respect and NCLB create crisis in teacher morale - article in Education Week.

11.8 Teacher Morale – the magic behind Teacher Performance by R.S. Mani, Uma Devi, Volume 8 - Issue 2.

11.10 **Power point presentations from speakers at the Character Education Forum in San Francisco:**

Dr Hal Urban (Keynote Speaker) – Lessons from the Classroom;

Penny Keith, Professional Development Director, Utah SSOC Coordinator - Transforming Schools The Caring Way;

Mark Schumacker - Adding Character to the Maths Classroom;

Dr Karen Geller (Principal of Upper Merion Area Middle School) - Character Education Drives Academic And Behavioural Success.

11.11 **Handouts from speakers at the Character Education Forum in San Francisco**

Charles Elbot (Denver) – Dynamic School Culture born Through Intentionality

Penny Keith - Develop the leader in each student through student forums and service learning.

Dr Karen Geller (Principal of Upper Merion Area Middle School) - Character Education Drives Academic And Behavioural Success.

11.12 Numerous articles from Education Week and Edutopia – online newsletters.

11.13 School Climate And Learning - Article in Best Practice Briefs No. 31 December 2004.
12. RESEARCH TOOLS DESIGNED AND COMPILLED BY ME:

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SA SCHOOL TEACHERS

Hi Colleagues

Please help me complete this simple questionnaire which is based on the following proposal for my action-based research in the United States:

INVESTIGATE THE FACTORS THAT TRIGGER TEACHER APATHY AND LOW MORALE AND FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO RAISE THEIR MORALE

QUESTION ONE:

In what ways does teacher apathy manifest itself in your school?

QUESTION TWO:

Does teacher apathy affect you and, if so, how?

QUESTION THREE:

How does teacher apathy negatively impact on your learners?

QUESTION FOUR:

Describe one measure you feel could improve teacher morale.

Thank you for your contribution. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Maggie Perumal
APPENDIX B: SURVEY

SURVEY - TEACHER MORALE

MAGGIE PERUMAL  SOUTH AFRICA

Below are 15 key factors that contribute to a teacher’s level of morale. Assess how you feel generally about each factor using the following five-point scale:

(5) very positive ; (4) positive ; (3) neutral ; (2) negative ; (1) Very negative.

Insert the number 1 in the appropriate block.

Your scores will be automatically compiled.

Use the scoring chart that follows the survey to get a general idea of your morale level.

Your honesty in answering will assist me greatly. Thanks.

What type of school do you teach at ?(private, charter, public etc):

What level (s) do you teach?

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SUB-TOTAL     0   0   0   0   0

TOTAL SCORE   0

HOW WELL DID YOU SCORE?

56 – 75 : Morale is generally positive (above 75%)
38 – 55 : Morale is average (50% - 74%)
15 – 38 : Morale is generally low (below 50%)
13. INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH DR A. COLEMAN, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT MONTGOMERY BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL  5 October 2011 (Responsible for 12th grade)

ABBREVIATIONS USED: I (Maggie Perumal) was the main interviewer (MP). The other interviewers were Mohammed Abdou (MA), Abderazzak Yagoubi (AY); Sangeeta Gulati (SG) and Elina Kaste (EK). Dr Coleman is referred to as AC

MP: Dr Coleman please tell us something about your school.

AC: This is the largest high school in Montgomery County with a student enrolment of 2815 and 300 staff members. It has a Maths/Science Magnet Academy and many other academies like the Business Academy, Law and Social Justice Academy, Services Academy. The school has a very diverse student population.

MP: What is the infrastructure in terms of Administration?

AC: We have a Principal and 4 Assistant Principals, and a Leadership team of the school made up of the Heads of Departments as well as the heads of the different programmes. We meet once a week and talk about the various issues related to the school. We meet on Tuesdays with the administrative team. We meet on Thursdays with the Leadership team. We also have a Guidance and Counselling team which makes up a very important piece of the puzzle. They are the ones that make the schedules and make sure the kids get the support that they need to get from 9th grade to 12th grade.
MP: And the structure of your time – table? I notice that sometimes you may find students from different grades in the same class? Is this a very open kind of time-table similar to a university?

AC: Yes and no. That happens sometimes because if a student does not pass a course in the 9th grade they will have to take the course again in the 10th grade. And there are persons who are in the 12th grade who did not pass that course in the 9th grade so they will have to take that course. It really varies why that may take place. And especially because we have the magnet programme so some kids are advanced and that’s why that may take place. And then there are elective courses that have a mixed breed so that may be the reason for some of that to take place.

MP: Who tracks those students in terms of where they are at any given point in time and when they exit?

AC: Ok that would be the counselling department. We have 11 counsellors in the school and the students then are divided up by grade level with the counsellors. And there’s an administrator for each grade level also. For instance I am the administrator for the 12th grade. So I deal with all the 12th grade counsellors and all the students within the 12th grade. We have a plan of action from the beginning of the year to ensure that everybody in the 12th grade – we make sure that they graduate. We ask the counsellors have by a certain date to make sure that they have all their credits. At the end of the first grading period we will look at all the students and see where they are and whether they are passing and what they need to pass in order to graduate. If they are not then what is our plan of action to get them to pass and to get them back on track. We call it academic support.
MP: What are some of the rituals, values and traditions that make your school one that you can be proud of?

AC: I think one is giving students support. In the state of Maryland the student must pass a state-wide exam in order to finish high school and that’s in Maths, English and in Science. Now part of our support base is that those students who are struggling in those classes, that we will give them support to help them pass the class and pass the test. That’s where the counsellors come in and that’s where we have the 12th grade academic support. Every Tuesday and Thursday these students come in for about 30 minutes and we have an actual process that we take them through. We have them watch their grades, print the information relating to their grades; we have them review the information. Our computer system is very advanced so we know exactly where every student is at any given time. It is very elaborate – very advanced so I can go to the computer right now and look at every class and see what every student is doing at this point. I know exactly where they are.

MP: Is there a special programme that you use?

DC: Montgomery County Public Schools has put this programme together for all of us to use. Teachers have some access but as administrators we have total access. (He went on to then explain how a student can be tracked from 8th grade and may not even remember some of his/her misdemeanours.)

MP: How are new teachers mentored?

AC: New teachers are assigned to existing teachers. The departmental head finds out the needs of the teacher. But more importantly the school system has what we call a support system; we also have a consulting teacher system. And so many times new
teachers new to the profession are given an outside consulting teacher who works with the teacher in the school to mentor and work with the teacher to enable him to become a better teacher. So Montgomery School System does a lot to enable us to work with teachers.

**MP:** Who appoints that consultant teacher?

**AC:** There’s an office of school performance that actually works with all the schools, working with the Principal and the Head of Dept to appoint the right teacher for the school.

**MP:** And is that consulting teacher placed in a normal school also?

**DC:** Yes they’re in a normal school setting and the consulting teacher comes in and observes the teacher teaching, then the Head of Department observes the teacher teaching and then there are “look fors”- Does the teacher know how to open the class? Does the teacher know how to focus on the 6 standards that are part of the school system? Does the teacher really know how to relate to the students? So, all those things are standards that we use to measure the teacher.

**EK:** Does the new teacher feel it is support or controlling their performance?

**AC:** That’s an excellent question. It’s really brought to the teacher through the Principal and explained. It’s really support as opposed to someone watching over you to see what you’re not doing. It really is a support system…. I think it is an excellent system of support ‘cos really it works for the entire school. And the Principal wants all of us to work with the teacher. If someone comes in from the outside and says that I don’t think that this teacher really has the background knowledge in Social studies, well we gotta look at that now, see. Are you in the right place to be teaching? Should they be
teaching? And then we have to say “If this is the case, what do we do to support the teacher and to help them become the best teacher possible.”

**MP:** Aside from giving support to new teachers what kind of support do existing teachers get?

**AC:** The approach that I’ve mentioned about the consulting teacher and the new teacher, that system also exists for existing teachers and it works similar to what I explained earlier. If I go into a class and I observe the teacher and I have some concerns about whether they’re actually reaching standard or whether they need to re-learn then I can then write that up and let the Principal be aware of my concern. But then in addition to that the Head of Dept will go in and do the same thing and if we see that there is an issue there, then we will let the teacher be aware of that, that these are our concerns, what do you thing we can do to help you get there to make things better. Then we might look at that and after 6 months we might decide to bring in a consultant teacher from the outside. That way the teacher does not believe that we are just pouncing on him and we need to make sure that we’re being fair in what we’re doing. That takes a little period of time. Also if it happens that we find there are some issues we need to deal with there is a process called Peer Assistance Review, (PAR). If that person then has certain standards, certain things they recommend he do in order to meet standard, and once that is done, then at the end of the year we can decide to recommend to work further with another consulting teacher if possible or it might be recommended that they not be a part of the teaching process. It’s very long and drawn out but documentation of the entire process is very, very key. It’s almost like if you have a system, the system should be fair…… And then there is a cycle that
we all have to go through (even administrators)- we all have to go through a 3 to 5 year evaluation cycle depending on how long they have been in the system.

**MP**: What happens then if there are shortfalls in the way they teach? Are they got rid of?

**AC**: Some, yes some are got rid of. But most teachers and administrators when they go through the system they come out a better person than they were….. If you’re really serious about the profession of teaching- the way it is set up –it really can help. It can very much be a nurturing process. Whenever you go through an evaluation process there will always be anxiety on both sides. Well my philosophy is, if someone is saying that I’m not doing something the way I should be doing, then prove them wrong. Go and do some studying, observe what other people are doing and then apply it and prove that person wrong that says I am not meeting standards. In that way it does not become an issue and I can grow in the process. I can become a better person next year than I was the year before.

**MP**: As an administrator do you have to deal with teacher unions?

**AC**: Teachers and administrators have different unions which have different standards, you know, teaching has one set of standards and administering has another set of standards, but there are lots of similarities. If a teacher feels his rights are being violated, he can go to the union and lay a grievance. If it is proven that that is the case then he can file a grievance, they have a hearing and then it can be proven that there is something going or that is not right. One thing I know we are all concerned about is the issue of fairness. Sometimes we as human beings, we have been in situations where someone does not like somebody, for personal reasons, then the issue becomes: Is it personal or professional? Now my personal philosophy is this: If it’s personal then the way to overcome it is to be better professional. Suppose someone says to me
I need to be on par because I’m not doing my job, but I know it’s personal. Well then you tell me professionally what it is I need to do and I’m going to focus on those professional issues you say I need to overcome or deal with and once I do those things, personal does not really matter. It’s professional that really matters. Prove them wrong. You say I am not a good administrator and I’ll prove you wrong. Then you document everything you do, you make sure you put together a notebook showing all the things you’re doing. You get people to write testimonials about what you can do and what you’re doing with them, then you’re proving them wrong. And then it gets out of the realm of “personal” and stays in “professional”.

**MP**: Coming to my most important question, do you believe that teachers in your school are happy, that is, morale is high?

**AC**: Ok morale is an issue that I think is an important piece of the puzzle. I think that that’s a leadership issue having been an administrator at all 4 levels (College, middle school etc). That’s a leadership issue as well as an issue of the kind of environment that the administrative team sets for the whole school community. For instance, I believe that it’s important that administration lets people know that they care about them as well as the institution. But administration is an art. You have to learn certain things as an administrator to help to create an environment where people feel good about being in the environment. A very important piece of the puzzle is recognizing people for what they do good, not always focussing on the negative. Make them feel special and a part of what you are doing. I walk around the buildings every morning talking to teachers. Extend yourself, have an open door policy. The administration team does a lot to build morale. It’s a 2-way street. My mentor once told me “A tree grows from the ground up, not top down. Every tree has a root. Make sure you nurture the root”. I
have a saying on my wall that says: “People are like gardens; they blossom when they are loved”. For example when one of my teachers could not make it to a meeting I sent her a note saying “Thank you for letting me know. I understand that sometimes things happen that are beyond your control. I will keep you in the loop. Can you make it for next week’s meeting?” And she sent me a reply saying “Thank you for understanding”. It might seem small but is an important piece to maintain morale. If I’d just let that go then I would not have got that response. It’s also about building respect for each other. When you respect teachers they respect you.

MP: Does your school have a School Improvement Plan and if so please elaborate?

AC: We have to write one every year at the beginning of the year for the Central office. We have to show here’s where we are when it comes to student behaviour, student testing etc. We have to write one every year. We have to say what we’re going to do this year to make next year better.

MP: As an established school, do you find challenges are getting fewer as the years go by?

DC: Challenges are just like seasons - they come and go. The key is to learn how to deal with challenges as they come up. How we work with the whole school community through collaboration and community problem-solving. I call it no-fault decision making. But there has to be a style of leadership where people believe it is open to be a part of the process. I am a strong believer in developing an action plan for everything where everyone can be a part of the process….. It’s like being an orchestra leader. There are all these instruments in the room but you have to get them to all play together to sound good. So I see the position of administrator as being an orchestra leader, putting it all together to make it work.
SG: I see there are so many courses running simultaneously and children moving from room to room, how do you manage to get them all in on time?

AC: This has to do with the philosophy of leadership - the orientation of students when they come in at the beginning of the year and the expectations. As a Principal, there needs to be expectations laid for faculty and students. In other words there are expectations that you go to class on time. Now there are also consequences when certain things are not done in a certain way. The Student Handbook has expectations as well as the consequences for all misdemeanours. We follow through. Students know that we will follow the expectation list eg if you’re tardy for class more than 5 times you run the risk of losing credit- students know that teachers reinforce that. You cannot wear hats in the building. If you do you must have a written note from your parent. If it’s for religious reasons that’s fine. But you must carry that note with you at all times. Again we call that order and discipline and you build it through building a process, communicating that process to everybody including the teachers and students.

SG: Is there a punishment if students are late 3 or more times?

AC: If it’s excused lateness then that’s approved, which means it’s not a penalty against them. But students know which situations are excused and which are not. But you get situations where some students come late no matter what. That’s why as administrators we have to deal with those students ourselves. If a student is referred to us, I might give them detention or I might give them a warning the first time. But I also might put him on a contract. But with seniors it is a little bit easier. They’ve got to finish High School, so I use that as my carrot. In other words: “You are now a senior, you must set the example. You’re also putting yourself in jeopardy of not graduating from high school… If you lose credit in this class you won’t finish high
school.” Then I will get the parent involved in the process. Parent involvement is another important issue of part of the process too. Either the parent will accept that he’s not graduating or the parent will do something.

**MP:** I know that school buses transport children to and from school. If you give them detention, how does that affect the way they go home?

**AC:** There are late buses that come. Sometimes detention is held during lunch. It’s not always necessary to give detention after school. It depends on the situation.

**MA:** It seems that there’s a lot of collaboration going on here between teachers and administration.

**DC:** Yes that is the key. Collaboration is the real key to morale. But teachers feel that they’re involved in the process. In other words we look for suggestions and recommendations from teachers. Sometimes teachers see things that we cannot see as administrators. So we ask them “What do you think of this? Sometimes we might say “Let’s try it this way this time.” or “Maybe we’ll try it this way the next time” or “Let’s think about it”. But I think that most people feel that when you are collaborating and seeking their view about things, you’re really nurturing them in having them as part of the process – and that’s ownership, when you feel like you are part of the process.

**MP:** Do you have many staff meetings and how are they broken up?

**AC:** We have a general faculty meeting the first Monday of every month. That’s scheduled. The second Monday of every month is scheduled for Departmental meetings. The 3rd Monday of every month is devoted to professional groups, in other words all teachers who teach American History might meet along with teachers who teach AP
Psychology. They’ll talk about what they’re doing in their classes. It’s called a PLC – professional learning community. They share amongst each other as peers. And then the 4th Monday there’s an open meeting. There’s a system that teachers are aware of when they come to school. They stay in after school for about an hour for these meetings. There is a contractual agreement with the union that you can only keep a teacher in 1 hour per week after their work day and they must have notice in advance.

**MP:** I notice that your school does not have a uniform. Does this not impede the disciplinary process?

**AC:** We have dress codes. Girls cannot wear certain things; boys can only wear certain things; no hats in the building. It does not impede discipline but we have to deal with it because it is part of the general things that we have to be concerned with.

**NB:** The taping ends here as the battery ran out on the video camera.
INTERVIEW WITH MR DIRK CAULEY – ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT MONTGOMERY BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL on 26th October 2011
(RESPONSIBLE FOR 9th GRADE)

ABBREVIATIONS USED: Maggie Perumal -MP; Mr Cauley - DC; Abderazzak Yagoubi –AY.

MP: Mr Cauley please tell us something about the average class sizes at Montgomery Blair.

DC: Ok. Basically it depends on the subject area. The average class size I would say is around 30 – 32, except for graduating class where students write HSA for graduation purposes – those classes are smaller. Other smaller classes are those that have special education students so that students will be provided with combinations that they need to be successful with, based on their learning disabilities.

MP: Where there are special needs children, how are they accommodated in the classroom?

DC: Depending on the learning disability of the student, if they have trouble focussing, we may have fewer students to eliminate the distraction. We may have students sit in front of the room so that teachers may provide them with one to one instruction. We may provide notes for them. Teacher aides will be present in some of the classes. There are some students who need writers when they’re taking tests and some that need readers. A team of teachers will take individual learners who have
been identified with a learning disability and they’ll create an IEP (Individual Education Plan) which will be put together to help them to be successful in their classes. We make sure that each teacher implements these types of accommodation so that they are successful throughout the year.

**MP:** Are teacher aides paid by the Department?

**DC:** They are paid by the State. They are called para-educators.

**MP:** How does the school request for teacher aides?

**DC:** It’s a formula. They look at the number of special ed students that have been assigned to the school to determine how many special educators to allocate to a school. So every student is identified by race, learning disability, economic status; age and as a result of that the school system provides staffing grids to determine how to staff a school. So every school has a different grid based on the number of kids presented to enrol at that school the following year.

**MP:** How would you describe your school environment in terms of Teaching and Learning?

**DC:** I think we have a very good school climate. The students are very well mannered considering some of the places I’ve been.

**MP:** How do you achieve that? Normally you would find children in high school are generally very disruptive.

**DC:** I think it’s the tone set by the staff, the resource teachers and Principal and how they set the tone for the mission and vision of the school. But then I think the things that are important, that people don’t really spend a lot of time thinking about, are the support services. How clean the building, yard, bathrooms and classrooms are. The other thing that is important is security. We provide a safe environment so students have to be comfortable with security. Kids have to know
that if there is a problem, that you can go to them. They are not feeling like they are criminals and they’re human beings. That is another important part of the climate. And then I think it is important for guidance counsellors and teachers to not only know their students’ academic history, but also to know how well the students are doing socially eg are they coming from a broken family? Are they having issues outside of the school day, so that when they come to school we provide them with that kind of support so they can be successful. It takes a lot to have a positive climate. I think the other thing in this school which makes a big difference is that you have a very supportive parent community. Parents are very involved. If you can make a connection between the parents and staff with the students, working together for the whole child, I think it does make a big difference. With this school we have 2 programs called the Cultural and Arts Programme (CAP) and the Magnet program. Children are able to get into the program because of academic performance. When you have students that are being successful surrounded by students that are somewhat motivated, you have a climate that yields to a very strong academic culture. This school has a very good reputation for academic success which just changes the whole climate.

MP: Where I come from it is very difficult to get parental support, so how do you achieve this?

DC: One of things that have been a major contributor for parental support is going to the online grading. The internet has created a more involved parent from a distance. With EDLINE, it allows parents to be informed on how their students are doing on almost a daily basis. As long as teachers update the grades on this system, parents can actually know how their students are doing even before the end of the marking period. So that prevents teachers and parents from having to take time off
from work in order to meet. They can meet virtually or they can communicate about student performance on a consistent basis. It also puts pressure on teachers to keep up with the grades and provide constant feedback so that the students are aware how well they’re doing all the time, thus enabling the parent to be more interactive with their student. Sometimes, because parents don’t have availability to a computer we will show them how to use it and we’ll provide labs for them to come in or we’ll show them how to go to an internet café or library so they can get access. I think that’s one of the most important pieces. A lot of times if parents are not involved with their kids they don’t know how to support them, so we try to empower parents to be involved in their child’s future.

**MP:** What about parental support in terms of non-curricular and co-curricular activities?

**DC:** That is a struggle and tied to the economy in this area. A lot of parents are working 2 to 3 jobs to maintain their families. So availability to provide voluntary support for games etc is hard.

**AY:** I notice that this is a very diverse school population. Are there any clashes or racial violence between students?

**DC:** I would say, for the most part, there is a lot of respect for student to student relationships. I think that you have a large number of people that come from so many different places. It almost yields to people’s tolerance of their differences. Sometimes there is tension between students who grow up in the same neighbourhood stemming from generations of tension, but we see less of that at Blair.

**MP:** How do you deal with such problems when they arise?
DC: The most effective way is to get parents of students involved. I have mediations. I bring in a taskforce person, resource people and we sit down and discuss issues to delve to the root cause. After that it seems to help. We provide them with the necessary resources, an understanding of where all this comes from, and when you change their mindsets you have families now coming together.

MP: Do parents respond when you invite them?

DC: Oh yes! Cos I won’t let them come back to school unless they come with their parents.

MP: What about suspensions?

DC: No suspensions because suspension just sends kids home with no resolution of the problem. I want them to go home so that they can be safe until I get the families to talk, because half the time the parents aren’t even aware of the problem. In grade 9 which I am responsible for, we have the lowest percentage of students who are felons- even lower than the seniors. One of the things I feel that has been very instrumental is letting them know that there is a relationship between their 9th grade year and their willingness and ability to go to college. I show them an example of a transcript of all their grades at the senior year and this transcript is what allows them to make choices for going to college. Once they get to 9th grade, they don’t know they’re building a transcript. So if you show them how everything on this transcript is going to be used for or against them, then grades make sense as grade don’t mean anything from k-8th grade. So I show them a good transcript and a poor transcript. I show them that a poor transcript can actually make you stay in high school for 5 years and never get out if they do not move forwards towards graduation. A lot of parents don’t know that there is a transcript.

MP: Who maintains that transcript?
DC: Every time you get a grade in each quarter it adds up to a final grade which goes on a transcript. Once I show them a tangible transcript they can see what they’re building towards. It gives them all the information they need. I believe as a result they’re taking school more seriously. It’s a small change but it’s the mindset that you have to change with the kids.

MP: How do you feel about your transition from a Maths teacher to an Assistant Principal?

DC: I always wanted to find resources for students who were not being successful. In this position I can speak to counsellors, find outside resources, go to teachers and find out what it is they’re doing or not doing to help kids be successful. So as an Assistant principal I can help the kids that can’t help themselves.

MP: You obviously love your job so how do you ensure that teachers love theirs?

DC: I provide them with feedback that’s going to help them to move students. You always have about 10% of your school population struggling. If you can clean up that 10%, the other 90% will take care of themselves. It’s that 10% that you’ve got to put all your resources into and if they don’t get that support, they’re going to destroy the other 90%. I called in all the 8th graders with low GPA and went through the whole process of being successful at school with them. I meet them once a week, check their grades, provide incentives and let them know someone cares about them and supports them and that they are going to be successful.

MP: Are teachers given any incentives by the school?

DC: What we try to do is to recognize teachers that go above and beyond the call of duty.

MP: How do you do that?
DC: We recognise them at staff meetings and constantly give feedback on classroom visits. I do classroom visits at least once or twice a week.

MP: What kind of professional development do teachers attend and what does the school offer in terms of professional development?

DC: Because of the economic status of the country there have been a lot of cutbacks in staff development. A staff development teacher provides staff development. One teacher is designated for staff development. His/ her main job is to provide staff development on a monthly basis. Staff training is provided on the latest instructional strategies that are most successful, relationship theories and diversity training. In addition all teachers are given a planning period and one IRA (Instructional Related Activity) per day. During IRA professional development is done. Other times PD is done during Staff and departmental meetings. At staff meetings teachers share best practices and latest instructional strategies that are helpful. Departmental staff go to county for monthly meetings and come back and share with their Department. Finally teachers are encouraged to take educational classes – the more classes a teacher takes the more he is paid. The State pays part of the teacher’s tuition for these classes up to 60%. They don’t have to do another degree, just take classes. If a teacher acquires 30 or more credits he gets paid as a masters student. Also teachers have to get a certain number of credits to maintain certification. As an Assistant Principal, my certification is up to 2013. Thereafter I need 6 more credits or I will lose my certification. If you lose your certification then there is a possibility you may lose your tenure. It kind of forces you to study.

MP: Mr Cauley, thank you so much. It’s been a pleasure talking to you and thank you for sharing your time with us. I know time is valuable to you and we appreciate you taking time off to help us learn a little bit more about Blair.