As educational leaders, we strive to find sound, empirical support to guide our decision making. Academic research backs up the ideas we have shared in this module about the importance of a learning community's culture, and each leader's role in setting and reinforcing that culture.

Among the most seminal sources on school culture are works by Terrence E. Deal and Kent D. Peterson. In their books, they discuss the administrator's role in shaping or reinforcing an environment where people function best, based on key values and central norms. They put forth a notion that seems very straightforward: that "leaders need to assess the culture by holding up existing ways against other possibilities." (2002, p. 13). They identify two complementary approaches that education leaders need to take when it comes to culture: identifying both the positive supportive norms and the aspects of the culture that may be toxic.

Deal and Peterson additionally state that "in positive cultures, these natural challenges are faced openly and dealt with; in negative cultures, these challenges fester and grow into dysfunctional attributes; Leaders must address these negative elements in order for the school to thrive (p. 88)." Indeed, it's harder to be unethical in a school culture where information is available, and collaboration is welcome.

There is additional support for this concept in a recent study about educator decision making. Hutchings and Norris (2013) found implicit norms in school and district cultures – unspoken but palpable ideas – that push hard against educators who consider reporting possible misconduct (as Ms. Gonzales did in our scenario). These implicit norms included:

- There is a collegial loyalty in not reporting perceived misconduct.
- There is a culture of silence that exists among teachers regarding ethical decision-making, due to a fear of consequences.
- Teachers are often placed in positions of powerlessness when faced with ethical decisions that might conflict with administration.

We know now that this kind of thinking is toxic to an ethical culture that wants to embrace the POSSIT principles. To lose transparency in decision-making not only erodes the school culture, but it places all members of the schooling community in a compromising situation.

When trying to support ethical conduct, we may hear people say that our efforts are not necessary, asserting that "Everybody knows what they are supposed to do, and everybody wants to do the right thing." Hopefully, we've learned in this course that the "right thing to

do" is not always so obvious! And a prominent social psychologist's, Albert Bandura, work suggests that people may not do the right thing unless they are encouraged. He states, "Moral standards do not function as fixed internal regulators of conduct. Self-regulatory mechanisms do not operate unless they are activated." (2002 p.105)

Further, Bandura believes that individuals can become "morally disengaged" due to the culture in which they operate: "... socio-structural practices create conditions conducive to moral disengagement..." (2002, p.116) So one's personal sense of ethics, and even a school's ethical climate, need to be stimulated, encouraged, and reinforced.

In short, encouraging those in your learning community to bring issues to the attention of you and your fellow leaders will have a positive ethical impact. Accentuating that positive act will give your ethical culture a huge boost – and the research proves it.