

# Teachers' Perceptions Towards Middle School Student Leadership

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## The Problem

The middle school years, Grades 6 through 8, are a transformative period of time where students grow and develop as people. In addition to the varied demands placed on teachers, research shows that teachers play a critical role in students' leadership development. As the COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on education, there has been a discussion amongst teachers on how to best support students, questioning leadership development and suggesting intervention or support classes. While there is a plethora of research on student leadership, the middle school years are often overlooked. Thus, there is a need for additional research on middle school student leadership development.

## Results

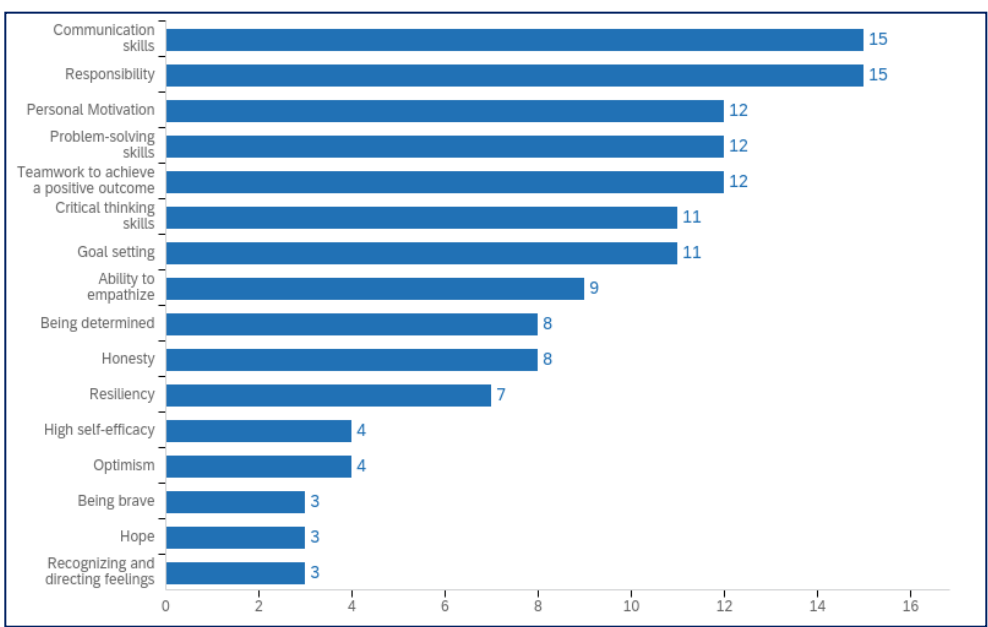
- Theme #1 Leadership Qualities:** Responsibility and communication skills emerged as the two key leadership qualities middle school students need.
- Theme #2 Students' Communities are Responsible for Developing Leadership:** Although teachers believe they have a role in developing student leadership skills, all participants identified that those within a student's community are responsible. Specifically, this includes the parents/guardians, school staff, teachers, and the students themselves.
- Theme #3 Activities to Develop Leadership Qualities:** Leadership electives, group work within the classroom, and extracurriculars were identified as the three subthemes within activities to develop leadership qualities.
- Theme #4 Barriers Teachers and Schools Face to Implementing Leadership Development:** The barriers identified included the students themselves, lack of support from the district, and lack of support from administration, teachers, and parents.

## Purpose of the Study

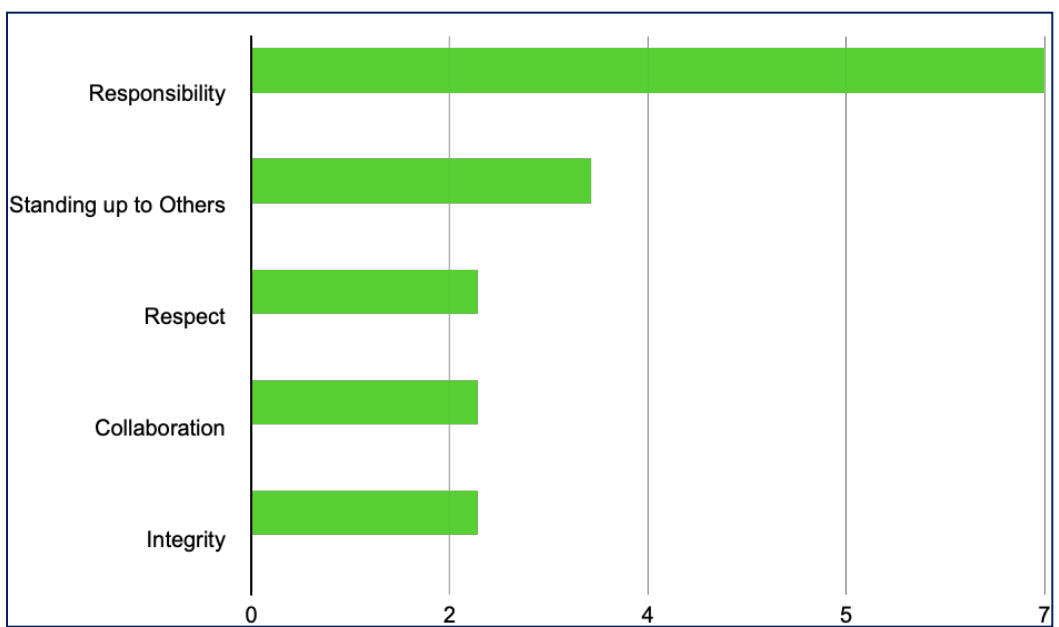
This research seeks to fill the gap and add to existing research by narrowing in on middle school teachers and identifying their perceived roles in their students' leadership development process. Specifically, this study examines the qualities that the teachers believe to be important for middle school leaders, activities teachers and schools can implement to develop said qualities, and the barriers teachers and schools face to implementing these opportunities.

## Research Question:

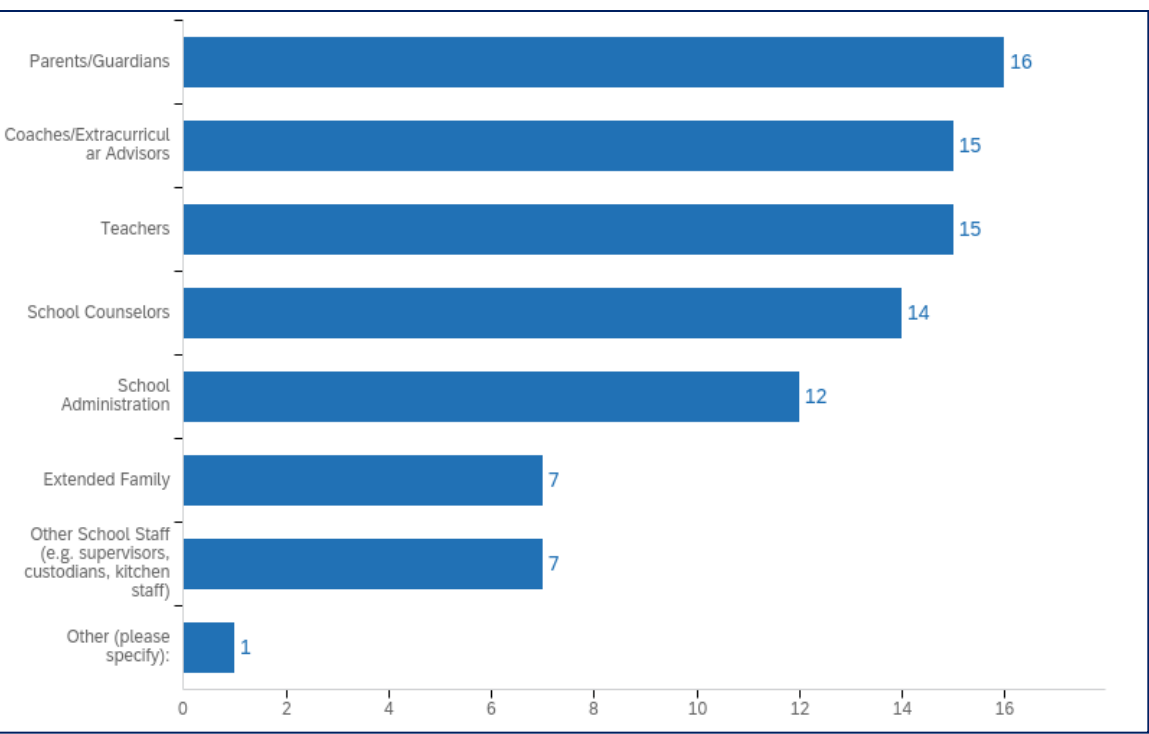
*What are teachers' perceptions of leadership development in the middle school years?*



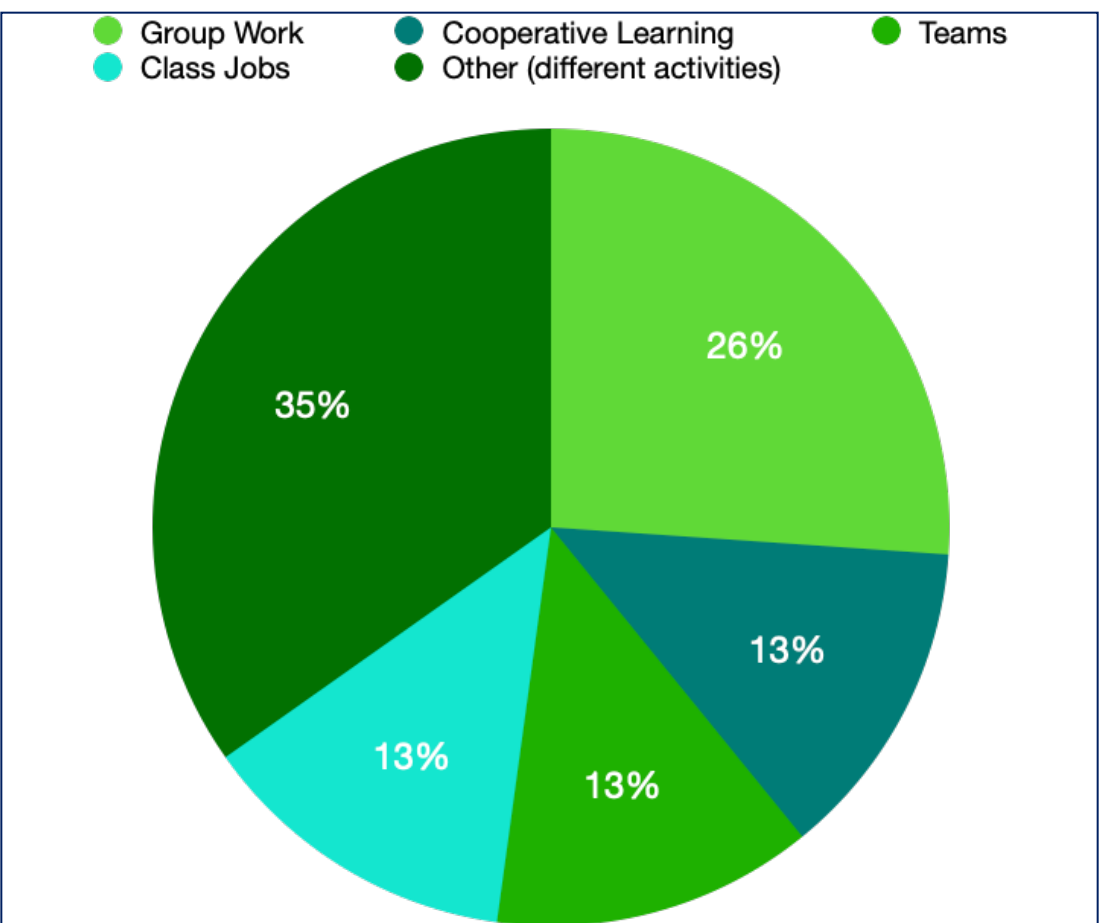
Important Middle School Leadership Qualities



Interviews



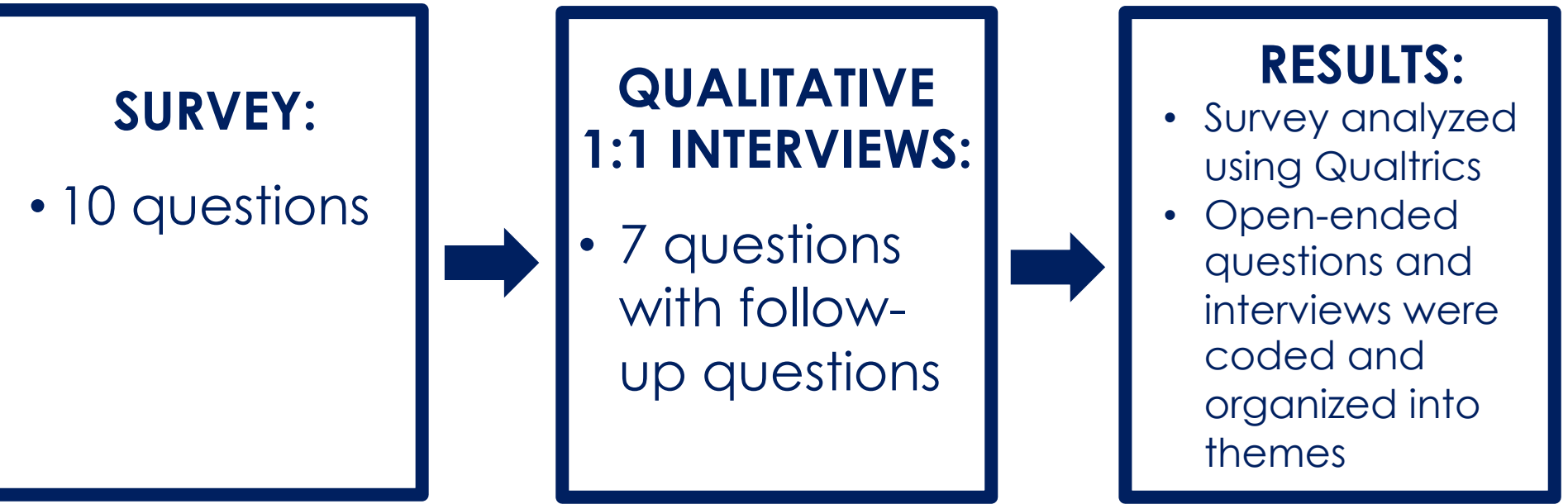
Responsible Parties for Developing Middle School Student Leadership



Activities to Develop Leadership Within the Classroom

## Methodology

A mixed-methods study was conducted through a survey and qualitative semi-structured 1:1 interviews. The participants were middle school teachers at a public K-8 school district in Southern California. The survey was sent to the participants' work emails and used the software, Qualtrics. The survey included checklist, multiple choice, open-ended and Likert-type questions. Sixteen teachers participated in the survey and the results were analyzed for frequency distributions and means. Nine participants opted to participate in the 1:1 semi-structured interviews which were conducted in-person in the researcher's classroom. The interviews were first transcribed and then coded and organized into themes. The open-ended questions in the survey were also coded and organized into themes.



## Implications

- This research study filled a gap in the research, narrowing in on teachers of the middle school years.
- Research should be conducted using a larger and more diverse group of middle school teachers.
- Further research should be conducted to determine parents/guardians and students' perceptions towards their role in student leadership development.
- While teachers understand their role in developing leadership, they identified barriers that schools and districts should consider when making decisions.