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The Characteristics of School Culture That Influence College-Going Rate for High School  
Graduates in Northeast Tennessee

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

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by

Annie M. Kariuki

December 2008

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Dr. Kathy Franklin

Dr. Glenn Bettis

Dr. Jim Lampley

Dr. Lee Daniels

Key word: school culture, college-going rate, learning organization, parental involvement,  
student ownership of learning

## ABSTRACT

### The Characteristics of School Culture That Influence College-Going Rate for High School Graduates in the Northeast Tennessee

by

Annie M. Kariuki

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of school culture that influenced college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee. The study involved one-to-one interviews with selected high school teachers and principals. Six high schools in northeast Tennessee were used in the study.

The significance of this study was to generate a grounded theory that could be used to explain the characteristics of school cultures that were effective in supporting students' college-going rates. This knowledge could be used to inform high school principals, school boards, state legislatures and other government bodies, and colleges and universities.

Findings in this study indicated that effective schools needed to establish a school culture that exhibited 5 major characteristics. These major characteristics helped schools improve students' performance, they helped improve students attendance rate and reduced students' drop-out rate, and they improved student college-going rate. The 5 characteristics were: (a) communicating high expectations to all stakeholders, (b) building a strong learning community, (c) promoting positive partnership with parents in the education of their children, (d) establishing partnership

with local industries, colleges, and universities, and (e) focusing on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education.

The conclusion made from this study was that communicating high expectations for stakeholders needed to be combined with support for stakeholders, especially for teachers and students, in order to maximize their potential to achieve high goals. Successful schools also needed to establish knowledge base for a community of learners. The learning community would encompass those areas that made the most impact on students' learning. These were: (1) knowledge supporting growth for the corporate faculty, (2) knowledge supporting growth and orientation of new teachers, and (3) knowledge supporting positive partnership with parents in the education of their children. Parental involvement in the education of their children played a major role in improving students' attendance rate; reducing the drop-out rate, and supporting students' college-going rates.

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## DEDICATION

First, I would like to thank God for enabling me to make it this far. Above all, God has taught me that he is faithful to keep his promises, even when we forget them. This work is also dedicated to my husband, Dr. Patrick Kariuki, and my three sons, Samuel, Daniel, and Elijah Kariuki. Thank you all for being the angels God used to lift me up through your continued prayers, your many humorous and inspiring stories, your jokes, hugs, and all manner of laughter that you surrounded me with throughout the course of this study. Patrick, thank you for constantly reminding me that, 'God does not bring us this far to leave us in the lurch.'

Lastly, this work is also dedicated to my parents, the late Mr. Eliud Ngicu Githire and my mother Julia Njoki Githire who instilled in me the value, love, and determination to strive for educational dreams. The story about how my father was forced to drop out of high school because of home circumstances, his desire to see his children experience their educational dreams, as well as my mother's story about how she ran away from home only to acquire a second grade education at a missionary school constantly played at the back of my mind. They pushed me to strive hard in the hope of giving back. My mother was denied educational opportunity by her father because of her gender.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, education has been used as a vehicle for human progress and social opportunities. Unfortunately, many high school students do not complete high school and many of those who graduate choose not to continue with postsecondary education (Greene & Forster, 2003). Today's educators are charged with the responsibilities of ensuring a safer learning environment for all students, for promoting high quality education, instilling high expectations for students' performance, supporting self-directed learning, promoting life learning skills, and inspiring students' to continue with postsecondary education. The complexities for educating the mass have greatly increased. A study conducted by Green and Forster to determine public high school graduation rate and college readiness in the United States found that only 70% of all high school students in public schools graduate. The study also indicated that only 32% of high school graduates leave school qualified for college. Previous studies, such as that conducted by Macunovich (cited in Chamberlain & Franklin, 1997) indicated that economical reasons dictated who continued with higher education. However, the study by Greene and Forster concluded that neither inadequate financial support nor lack of affirmative action policies could be blamed for students' lack of motivation to continue with higher education or for lack of preparedness for higher education.

Information from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, 2007) also support Greene and Forster graduation rate and even suggested a relatively stable, national graduation rate since the year 2000. NCHEMS indicated that the

national average rate for high school graduation from the year 2003 to 2005 was 67.7%, 69.7%, and 68.8% in that order.

NCHEMS (2007) also indicated a stable, national college-going rate since 2000. The national college-going rate for students coming directly from high school was 55.7% in the year 2004, 56.6% for the year 2002, and 56.7% for the year 2000. Based on these figures, it can be generalized that almost half the number of those who graduate from high school fail to continue with postsecondary education. Therefore, if approximately 70% graduate, according to NCHEMS and Greene and Forster (2003), then only approximately 35% continue with postsecondary education. In the long run, the number of high school students who do not continue with higher education becomes large. As mentioned, Greene and Forster found that only 32% of all high schools graduates were qualified for college entrance. Further, their study concluded that students who failed to plan for a college degree were less likely to gain full access to the country's economic, political, and social opportunities. Although these researchers concluded that the majority of students that failed to graduate or continue with postsecondary were African-American or Hispanics, it was clear that students from all races were affected if only 70% of all high school students graduated, and only 32% of those graduates were actually ready for college entrance.

Many researchers, including Bandura (1993, 1997), Deal and Peterson (1999), Fullan (2001), Hoy and Miskel (2005), and Renchler (1992) have indicated that school culture plays an important role in enhancing students' achievement, building students' confidence to complete high school, or strengthening efficacy beliefs about potential to succeed if they continued to college. Further, these researchers believed school administrators played a major role in shaping

effective school cultures. Bandura used the term self-efficacy to denote human motivation to undertake important projects in life. Kariuki and Wilson (2003) asserted that motivation was a function of a person's self-confidence. Self-efficacy can be defined as a person's judgment that he or she is capable of organizing and carrying out the plan of action necessary to achieve a certain level of performance successfully. Along this line, collective teacher efficacy was reported to play a crucial role in enhancing students' achievement and building their confidence to complete high school.

Whereas safety issues, quality of education, and parameters for high expectations were factors indicative of direct institutional influences on students, students' efficacious developments were indirect consequences of the schooling processes the students received. These schooling processes symbolized the school culture through which individuals were nurtured and by which their confidences and competencies were developed. Deal and Peterson (1999) asserted positive school cultures had the potential of influencing and transforming negative school attitudes to positive ones. Bandura (1993) declared that collective teacher efficacy, which signified a positive school culture, had a greater impact on students' achievement than socioeconomic status. Along this line, Renchler (1992) emphasized that there was a positive correlation between school culture, students' motivation to learn, and students' achievement. Therefore, these researchers were asserting that support for a strong school culture could be the best option for improving students' achievement, improving the graduation rate, and enhancing students' college-going rate than any other factor.

Research also indicated that school culture played a major part in supporting experiences of new teachers. In a study completed by Young (2007) to investigate how elementary

principal's beliefs and actions influenced new teacher's experiences, approximately 30% of first year teachers were reported to leave their jobs after the first year. Another 14% migrated to other schools or new districts after the first year. The study indicated that the nature of induction processes, the degree to which principals offered direct or indirect support to new teachers, and the degree of instructional assistance new teachers received from their mentors and colleagues played an important role in determining their stay.

School culture was also credited for enhancing collegial support that characterized a professional culture. Newmann and Associates (1996) concluded that successful schools flourished in cultures where student learning was the main focus, where professional commitment and expectations of student performance was high, where communication among professionals was open, and where the social support for each other and search for innovation was high. Along this line, Fullan (2001) noted that professionals supported each other collegially by sharing knowledge. Knowledge sharing could be in the form of instructional materials, ideas, and innovations. Further, professionals frequently participated in school-wide-decision-making (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). The culture exemplified by these researchers, could, therefore, be described as a professional culture; Bandura (1993, 1997) refers to it as the normative culture. Consequently, it can be deduced that in professional cultures, individuals supported each other in many ways including sharing instructional materials, sharing in ideas and innovations such as integration of classroom technology, and they participated in many school-wide-decision-making processes. Further, professional cultures made student learning their primary focus, and teacher commitment as well as collective teacher efficacy were high. Fullan maintained that collegial support and collaborative activities were a way of building knowledge or another way of

achieving professional development. Along this line, Senge (1990) emphasized the importance of a learning organization as the antecedent for a successful organizational culture. Both Fullan and Senge asserted that learning organizations helped to strengthen employees' relationships and to create a meaningful culture. Further, school administrators within professional cultures learned to tap into their highly qualified professionals for problem-solving strategies, innovative ideas about school programs, and other decision-making strategies (Fullan; Owens, 2001).

Schools with strong cultures were also more likely to integrate the use of technology for classroom instruction and for communication with parents than those with weak cultures. Research supports the fact that use of technology for class instruction supports student learning styles and helped to enhance their learning. A survey conducted by Levin and Arafeh (2005) indicated that about 87% of the youth between ages 12 through 17 used the Internet. That's about 21 million of this age group. The study continued to show that about 86% to 88% of youth within this age believed that the Internet helped them to do better in school. Use of computers and Internet has also been associated with improved students' reading and writing. About 78% of the youth in the study reported using the Internet for instant messaging or emails to talk about homework, tests, and schoolwork.

Schools with a strong culture were also a learning culture. As mentioned, Fullan (2001) maintained that schools with strong cultures were strong in collegial support and were highly collaborative. Therefore, collegiality and collaborative activities were a form of knowledge building or a form of professional development. Faculties who were technically savvy or who were strong in some areas supported those who were not in the areas. Both Senge (1990) and Fullan highlighted the concept of learning organizations as the antecedent for successful

organizational cultures. In this concept, Senge emphasized the importance of the inter-independence that developed or the organizational inner cohesion as people learned together. The idea of learning institutions, however, may have originated with Deming (2000) who offered these ideas as early as the 50s. According to the U.S Department of Education (2006), ongoing professional developments were considered crucial for ensuring continuous school improvement. Because of this, all states now mandate that teachers fulfill some stipulated number of hours in professional development. Based on these ideas, it can therefore be deduced that professional cultures were those that shared instructional materials, ideas, or innovations, that participated in other forms of professional development, and that contributed their ideas in decision making.

Strong school cultures also connected well with parents. Research supported the fact that parents' involvement in the education of their children improved students' behavior and achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parental involvement also played a role in students' attendance and graduation rate. Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized; "only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish" (p.132). These authors also noted that it was important for schools whose primary focus was educating students to narrow the cultural gap that often arose between the schools and parents or between the schools and the community in order to support the learning of students. Unfortunately, not all school cultures supported a strong partnership with parents or a professional culture that centered on students' learning and achievement. As noted by Hoy and Miskel (2005), "organizational cultures [could] improve or hinder the effectiveness of an organization" (p.163). The goal of this research was to explore the characteristics of those school cultures that instilled high students' confidences to embark on postsecondary education. School cultures that consistently achieved



high rates of students' enrollment for postsecondary education, all things being equal, were considered effective. The goal was to develop a grounded theory for explaining the characteristics of such schools.

### *Statement of Problem*

A study conducted by Greene and Forster (2003) indicated that students who failed to plan for college were less likely to gain full access to the country's economic and social opportunities. The problem was about 30% of students who entered high school dropped out before graduation. Greene and Forster's study also indicated that many graduating high school students did not take the college entrance exams; while yet another group of students with high GPAs, high achievement scores, and good class ranking chose not to apply for college. Among those who chose to continue, many were ill prepared; 49% freshmen for all institutions were reported to take remedial courses in the year 2001.

Information from the NCHEMS Center (2007) confirmed Greene and Forster (2003) study and indicated that a total of approximately 40% students did not continue with postsecondary education. Furthermore, in regard to minority students, Greene and Forster indicated that lack of financial aid or lack of affirmative action policies could not be blamed for students' lack of motivation to continue or for their lack of preparedness. However, from a general point of view, the fact that only 70% of all students who entered high school graduated, and the fact that only 32% of those who graduated were college ready implied the problem was wide spread. Therefore, the question about how to motivate high school students to complete high school, to achieve better college entrance scores, and to become inspired to continue with postsecondary education was considered important for exploration. Many researchers, including

Bandura (1993, 1997), Deal and Peterson (1999), Fullan (2001), Hoy and Miskel (2005), and Renchler (1992) have indicated that school culture played a major role in enhancing student achievements and building efficacy beliefs about their abilities to embark on major projects in life, including continuation with postsecondary education. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of school culture in supporting college-going rates. However, because students' retention rate and achievement were also tied to students' college-going rate, these factors were also indirectly explored.

#### *Statement of Intent*

The intent of this study was to develop a theoretical framework to explain the characteristics of effective high school cultures in supporting student college-going rates. The intent was to generate the theoretical framework by exploring the perceptions of teachers and principals about what constitutes an effective school culture for enhancing college-going rates. Six high schools in northeast Tennessee were used to develop the theoretical framework.

#### *Research Question*

The overarching research question for this study was: What were the characteristics of school cultures that became effective in supporting students' continuation to colleges and universities?

#### *Statement of Significance*

Most previous studies about school culture were in the quantitative format. Few, if any, used qualitative research method to explore the perceptions of educators about what constitutes effective culture and to develop an explanatory scheme based on the findings. The significance of this study was to generate a grounded theory that could explain to high school principals and

school boards the characteristics of school cultures that were effective in supporting students' college-going rates. High school principals could use this information to improve their school culture with the hope of increasing student college-going rates. They could also use this knowledge to strengthen parental involvement in the education of their children with the goal of improving students' attendance and retention rate, students' behavior and achievement, and in general, improve the teacher-parent relationship. School boards and state legislatures could gain insights as to how they could influence the establishment of effective high school cultures through school policies. State and local school boards could increase support for appropriate professional development programs, support for collaborative teacher planning time, support for integrated curriculum planning time, and support for teachers' input. They could also increase their support for school-integrated technologies to enhance students' learning and for increasing communication with parents. Stakeholders, businesses, alumni, and members of the community could determine effective ways to support schools through their participation and donations, especially for software and other instructional materials that support classroom instruction. Colleges and universities could use this knowledge to partner with high schools, to inform about essential courses for college entrance, and to provide incentives for students to complete high school and apply to their colleges or universities.

#### *Scope of the Study*

The researcher interviewed 36 teachers and nine principals or assistant principal in six high schools in northeast Tennessee. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the perceptions of these educators about the relationship between the school culture and college-going rates and to generate a theoretical framework about the phenomenon.

### *Definitions of Terms*

For the purpose of understanding the way some words and phrases have been used in this study, a list of definitions was added below:

Theoretical framework: the structure of main ideas, major concepts, or key variables, and how they are interrelated into a theoretical model.

Purposeful sampling: sample based on some predetermined criteria that were expected to produce maximum results. In this case, the predetermined sample was expected to produce maximum variation of viewpoints (Merriam, 1998).

Effective school culture: For the purpose of this study, effective school culture was defined as the culture that was effective in supporting student learning and graduation. Therefore, student retention rate, graduation rate, rates of students who achieved good scores in college entrance exams, and rates of students who continued with postsecondary education all became factors.

College-going rate: the percentage rate of students' going to colleges and universities (Chamberlain & Franklin, 1997).

Student achievement: students test scores based on such standardized exams as the ACT or SAT, test scores recognized for college entrance. Also, high students' GPA and high-class ranking were indicative of students' achievements.

Motivation: an internal state that stimulates, directs, and maintains behavior (Hoy & Miskel, p. 156). The level of stimulant could also intensify behavior or sustain perseverance. The stimulant could be derived from intrinsic rewards such as personal interests, satisfaction in a job well done, enhancement of personal values, or achievement.

It could also be derived from external stimulants such as grades, recognition, meaningful involvement, and other incentives.

Self-efficacy: a person's personal judgment about his or her capability to organize and execute a course of action that is required to attain a certain level of performance (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p.150).

Collective efficacy: the shared perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p.176).

Postsecondary education: this term was used synonymously with higher education. The term referred to education beyond high schools.

Professional culture: professional culture was defined as that culture where teachers supported each other in many ways, including sharing of instructional materials, ideas and other innovations, and that participated in many school-wide decision-making. Professional cultures made student learning their primary focus, they held high expectations for all stakeholders, they maintained strong social support with open communication, and they were committed to the search of new innovations.

Professional development: referred to individual teacher's growth plan or on the whole-staff improvement plan. Collegial support and many other collaborative activities fulfill the individual growth plan as teachers share their ideas, teaching strategies, or materials.

Parental involvement: participation of parents in the education of their children. The degree to which parents were expected to participated differed with schools.

A learning community: for the purpose of this study, a learning community was defined as a community where everybody was a learner. Therefore, the students, parents,

teachers, and the principal were involved in a learning that sought to improve students' performance, growth, and achievement. Therefore, all the various learning projects that kept these stakeholders learning were part of the learning community.

Student ownership of their learning: when students develop value and love for education, so that they become self-directed in their learning, engage in self-investigative strategies, and seek to prioritize their time. The end result should be that students engage in learning because they enjoy it and find value in it and not because parents, teachers or tests are dictating their will to learn. This does not imply doing away with standards.

School vision: the governing moral principle or philosophy that guides the school mission.

Making coherence: in this study, the term 'making coherence' was used to refer to the state of increasing understanding, helping to make sense, or showing the rationale behind the many school activities outside the teacher's primary load. Seeking to make coherence in an organization, therefore, implies providing a general understanding of what is going on in the organization and the reasoning behind the different practices. Helping to make coherence could imply showing the congruency between a school's activities and its ultimate goal or vision, and showing consistency of the values being upheld.

#### *Study Limitations and Delimitations*

This qualitative study was delimited to teachers and principals in selected high schools in northeast Tennessee. Because the generation of the theoretical framework was based on purposeful sampling, the results could not be generalized to other populations. However, the

concepts derived from the theoretical framework could be used to develop a follow up survey for quantitative study in future.

### *Overview of Study*

This study had five chapters. Chapter 1 contained the introductory part of the study. In this section, the researcher introduced the reader to previous research relevant to the research topic about student college-going rates. This section also covered the statement of the problem, the statement of intent, the research question, the statement of significance, the scope of the study, study limitations, delimitations, and the overview of study. Chapter 2 covered the literature review pertinent to the topic of study, while Chapter 3 explained the methodological sequences used or the research method. Chapter 4 contained the process of data analysis leading to the development of the theoretical framework. Chapter 5 had the study findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *General Review*

Today's educators are facing greater challenges than ever before. They are expected to provide a safe learning environment for all students and to provide high quality education that supports student achievements. Unfortunately, the lack of motivation for many high school students to even graduate has been pressing hard on educators. In a study completed by Greene and Forster (2003) many high school students did not complete high school while a majority of those who did choose not to continue with higher education. The study indicated that college-going rate was only 32 %.

Information from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, 2007) supported Greene and Forster low graduation and college-going rates. A comparison of the graduation and college-going rate from the years 2000 to 2005 seem to indicate constant rates within the 5 year period. Interestingly, the study by Greene and Forster also indicated that inadequate finances or lack of affirmative action policies were not the reasons students failed to pursue postsecondary education. A previous study by Macunovich, cited by Chamberlain and Franklin (1997), had indicated that economic reasons dictated who continued with higher education. However, Green and Forster seemed to imply that students' lack of motivation was the main reason students failed to continue with postsecondary education. They cited previous studies as indicating that "significant number of students with high GPAs, [high] test scores, and [high] class rank[ing] did not go to college" (p.4). Greene and Forster insisted that students who failed to plan for a college degree failed to gain full access of economic,



political, and social opportunities. If college education was considered important for ensuring full access to economical and social opportunities, the question about how to motivate high school students to not just complete high school but to also continue with postsecondary education needed some answers.

Many researchers including Bandura (1993), Deal and Peterson (1999), Fullan (2001), Hoy and Miskel (2005), Newmann and Associates (1996), Owen (2001), and Renchler (1992) identified school culture as the main factor behind successful schools in enhancing student motivation to learn, student completion of high school, and student continuation with postsecondary education. Renchler emphasized that the correlation between school culture, student motivation to learn, and student achievement were high. Bandura in his study about collective teacher efficacy, a major component of effective school culture, concluded that collective teacher efficacy was the best indicator for student achievement and that it had a greater impact on student performance than socioeconomic status.

Hoy and Miskel (2005) and Kariuki and Wilson (2003) argued that motivation was a function of self-confidence. Bandura (1993, 1997) added that student efficacy to embark on major projects in life was tied to previous successes. Therefore, students' successes and achievements in high school would be tied to their efficacious beliefs that they can successfully cope with postsecondary education. Bandura referred to this component of efficacy as mastery. Consequently, students who perceived success in performance as a function of personal effort, and not mere luck, were more likely to believe their effort will affect their successes in college entrance examinations such as the SAT or ACT as well as successes in colleges and universities.

Not all school cultures were effective in nurturing students' confidences. Hoy and Miskel (2005) maintained that there was a high correlation between organizational culture and its effectiveness: "strong organizational culture [could] improve or hinder the effectiveness of an organization" (p.163). In their book, Deal and Peterson (1999) have indicated a contrast between good school cultures and some toxic ones that tore down student self-confidence instead of building it. Along this same line, Renchler (1992) asserted that positive cultures play a critical role in supporting students' attitudes, motivation to learn, and achievements. Deal and Peterson concluded, "cultural patterns are highly enduring, have powerful impact on performance, and shape the way people think, act, and feel" (p.4).

#### *Definition of School Culture*

Several authors have different definitions for culture, two of which are noteworthy. Ouchi (as cited in Hoy & Miskel, 2005) defined "organizational cultures as symbols, ceremonies and myths that communicate the underlying values and beliefs" (p.165). Schein (also cited in Hoy & Miskel) defined culture as a "deeper level of basic assumptions, values, and beliefs' that become shared and taken for granted as the organization continues to be successful" (p.165). The definition from Deal and Peterson (1999) was also appealing. School culture can be understood as the:

unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations, that seem to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or avoid talking about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or don't, and how teachers feel about their work and students" (p. 2-3).

Owens (2001) defined organizational culture as "the organization's dominant values... basic assumptions and beliefs ...and as the philosophy that guides" (p.145). The easiest and most concise definition was offered by Bower, cited by Deal and Peterson (1999), "the way we

do things around here,” (p. 3). Based on all these definitions, it can be deduced that an organizational culture was manifested through shared values, norms, beliefs, expectations, and assumptions that were communicated through symbols, ceremonies, myths, stories, and traditions, causing members of the organization to become united and their organization to stand out as a unique entity from others. Newmann and Associates' (1996) concept about the professional culture suits this description well.

Newmann and Associates (1996) in their study about school success concluded that a professional culture flourished where students' learning was the main focus; where professional commitment and expectations for students' performance was high; where there was open communication and social support among the employees; and where there was search for continued improvement. Fullan (2001) emphasized the need for building knowledge through collegial support and collaboration. These included sharing of instructional materials, sharing of ideas, and, in general, developing the attitude of teamwork. Deal and Peterson (1999) and Fullan also pointed to yet another crucial element for school culture, the school vision.

#### *School Vision and Commitment*

Senge (1990) and Fullan (2001) both advocated that leaders develop a personalized, idealized vision about where they wanted their organization to go. Senge emphasized that this vision needed to be inspirational enough to keep leaders striving to attain its ideals and causing faculty to embrace it as their own. Deal and Peterson (1999) and Fullan strongly asserted that school vision needed to be morally driven and centered on a culture of students' learning. According to Owens (2001), leaders with inspirational vision were expected to sell its ideals to others, to generate support for the vision, and to inspire followers to embrace it as their own.

This was the strategy used by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Northhouse (2004) indicated that transformational leaders had an idealized vision that inspired followers to commit to its ideals. The more convincing the vision, the greater the potential it held to inspire followers' commitment. Fullan held this same viewpoint when he asserted that successful organizations were guided by a moral purpose upon which cultural elements became centralized. In other words, according to Fullan, cultural practices, values, norms, assumptions, traditions, and ceremonies became meaningful through a centralized moral vision. Therefore, when the primary focus of the vision was students' learning, which was a moral purpose, then selling the vision to the faculty, parents, and other stakeholders created a unifying moral goal. Furthermore, according to Fullan, this unifying vision helped to solidify relationships, to increase coherence, or in the words of Deal and Peterson, to provide the rationale why we do things 'the way we do around here'. Fullan maintained that a school vision added meaning as to why the commitment to students' learning; why the professional development; why the adoption of certain policies; why the inclusion of celebrations, ceremonies, symbols, stories, rituals, and myths. Under these perspectives, Deal and Peterson asserted that a school vision with values was the bedrock for successful organizational culture.

Many schools have a vision statement, but they do not incorporate it as a guiding principle. As mentioned, Fullan (2001) indicated schools driven by a moral vision performed better because members strove to operate by its ideals. The best illustration of an organization committed to operate by its idealized vision was presented by Davidson (1996). According to Davidson, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Johnson & Johnson Company decided to recall an entire Tylenol capsule product from the market after learning that a mad man had

tampered with the product leading to the deaths of some people. Therefore, not knowing how many other capsules had been tampered with, the CEO decided to recall all the capsule products that were on the shelves across the nation. Obviously, with billions of Tylenol capsules already in the market, this caused a huge loss to the company. Davidson noted that the CEO commitment to follow through with the company's idealized vision was inspired by a statement in its credo. Amazingly, contrary to the huge loss that was anticipated to follow, the public trust for all Johnson and Johnson's products grew in bounds. This trust not only created old customers' loyalty for all the company's products, it also brought in new customers leading to soaring gains and shifting the company's market share to the effect that its marginal profits outbalanced its loss. Since then many other companies have followed similar heroic decisions. However, the crucial lesson here was that even without knowing how the company was going to deal with anticipated loss, the CEO was already committed to following through with what was morally inspiring, saving lives. Similarly, schools driven by an idealized school-wide vision that focused on student learning created gains that translated to student success. This was what Owens (2001), Northhouse (2004), and Fullan were referring to. The vision became effective when followers, in this case school faculty and other stakeholders, internalized the vision as their own, making personal commitment to operate by its ideals.

#### *Manifestations of Culture*

Hoy and Miskel (2005) maintained that culture was manifested through school values, norms, beliefs, and traditions. Norms were the unwritten rules or group expectations for behavior, dressing, or language. Norms could develop informally or formally, but they were often reinforced by group members. Sanctions against breaking norms included ostracism,

ridicule, or jeering by the members of the group. However, in the more sophisticated professional cultures where respect for others was equally important, correction was more constructive in the form of advice or suggestion.

Values were cognitive views about what was worth engaging in or what was worth a person's effort and commitment. Values defined the standard of excellence. Beliefs, on the other hand, related to what we hold to be true or to be reality. For example, teachers' beliefs about students' ability to learn could either be positive or negative. According to Bandura (1993, 1997) and Hoy and Miskel (2005), beliefs were shaped by past experiences and could also be improved. As mentioned, Deal and Peterson (1999) saw values and vision as the bedrock for effective school cultures.

#### *School Structure and the Role of Leadership*

Schools as we know them are hierarchical in structure and bureaucratic. Organizational structure denotes style of control. Hierarchical structures were construed with the top-down control, with management giving directives to the lower-level subordinates or employees. These lower-level subordinates were expected to comply. Bureaucratization, on the other hand, referred to the division of labor.

The hierarchical structures are probably the most ancient in the administration of humans and, therefore, very difficult to change. This form of control was evident in many early church organizations, becoming a practice that was passed on to each new generation. Hierarchical forms of control were also evident in Egyptian times and were operational in the course of building the pyramids. Fredrick Taylor was, however, credited with the formalization of hierarchical roles and responsibilities. Taylor, in an effort to perfect scientific management,

formalized organizational roles, making top management concerned with the role of goal setting, planning, execution of organizational directives, and supervision or enforcement of those directives. The role of subordinate employees was to carry out management directives or to comply with management orders (Owens, 2001).

Owens (2001) noticed that the hierarchical relationships resulted in managers amassing too much power. Consequently, leadership in many organizations, including schools, resist new leadership concepts such as those supporting employees' participation in decision making and other general brainstorming strategies because they see these strategies as taking power and control from them. Unfortunately, the time when Taylor conceived formalized roles when managers were the most knowledgeable, and certainly the most qualified to assume directorship, is past. Today, many employees are highly qualified professionals, sometimes more qualified than the top management who continue to insist on giving directives. Hoy and Miskel (2005) noticed that this factor, by itself, contributed to the many recent conflicts in schools: "the higher the level of professional orientation, the greater the number of conflicts" (p.118).

Recent researchers maintain that because Taylorism hierarchies were designed for industrial organizations, school administrators should reconsider the ramification of maintaining this model. These researchers have emphasized the need for today's administrators to see themselves as leaders and not as managers. Kotter (1990) explained that there was a difference between leaders and managers, especially in the way they related to followers. In other words, the guiding philosophy for a leader as well as the underlying beliefs, assumptions, and values of a leader were quite distinct from those of a manager, especially an industrial manager. To begin with, industrial managers interact with humans who operated on machines; school leaders

interact with professionals who teach other humans, children. The orientation for these two backgrounds does not mesh. Whereas it would be okay for industrial managers to give specific directives about how to produce according to predetermined specification, leaders in the school setting cannot give specific directives about how to teach or relate to students. A higher degree of academic freedom must be allowed in the school setting. Further, many schools today hire highly qualified professionals whose intelligence, orientation, values, beliefs, and assumptions are way above ordinary subordinates. Therefore, insisting on giving directives to such professionals implies undermining their professionalism. Consequently, the biggest role a school leader could assume is that of a facilitator and a model about best practices. In fact, debates over whether the hierarchical structure hinders or aids better relationships between leaders and the professionals stem from these assumptions (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

Research seems to indicate that there is a correlation between school size and the degree to which leaders are able to impact cultural elements effectively. According to Rowan (cited by Hoy & Miskel, 2005), private schools had the privilege of defining a narrower mission compared to public schools because they were not subject to the many pressures that public schools faced. Because of this, private schools could structure their instructional environment differently than public schools. For example, their schools could be “small in size, less bureaucra[ti]c, little or no vocational education, [and] fewer curriculum offerings” (p. 258).

Max Weber was credited with the concept of division of labor. Weber conceived bureaucracies as the efficient way for enhancing organization operations through job specialization. Specialization in bureaucracies was expected to aid and strengthen different sectors of an organization (Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Owens, 2001). However, unlike the hierarchical



form of control, bureaucracies are not in themselves a hindrance to organizational success. In fact, they aid them. Leaders in school settings are not expected to be experts in every area and every department, but they are expected to understand how to relate to others in a manner that facilitates professionalism.

### *The Role of School Administrators in Shaping School Culture*

Renchler (1992) and Young (2007) indicated that school administrator's shaped school culture through their personal motivations, values, and beliefs. Renchler (1992) maintained that the positive attitude of highly-motivated principals towards learning was contagious. Similarly, Young (2007) asserted that the degree to which new teachers felt supported by school leaders determined whether they will stay or leave. School leaders shaped school culture by the vision they embraced for their schools, by the degree they supported parental involvement, by the degree they supported professional growth and exchange of ideas among the faculty, and by the degree they were willing to share decision-making power with their professional faculty instead of becoming dispensers of directives. School leaders who shared power with their faculty helped to improve trust and working relationships among faculty. Also, leaders who supported professional growth and collegiality made direct impact on the students. In addition, leaders who influenced school alumni, community, businesses, colleges, and universities to support through donations and other avenues benefited their schools through these investments.

As mentioned, school leaders shaped school culture by the vision they embraced. Owens (2001) noticed that this was the strategy Gandhi and Martin Luther King adopted and that by failing to establish a school-wide governing vision, administrators risked being swayed by the challenges inherent with the job. Owens indicated that some school leaders drifted from the

original school purpose to some totally different goals without their notice. He cited administrators who viewed leadership from the perspective of a power struggle. These administrators were reported to spend many hours trying to put out fires, sometimes fires they set. Consequently, employees under politically-motivated leadership greatly suffered from low morale, political tension, grapevine gossips, employers' favoritism, and other forms of dysfunctional job relationships. Politically-inclined schools were characterized by a shift from the original focus on student learning to one that focused on personal gains. Although Birnbaum (1988) acknowledged that lack of some political wisdom in school funding could have an adverse impact on school projects, knowing how to use political influence to support school funding does not require engaging stakeholders in endless political battles. Many administrators understood that in order to influence allocation of government funding into some school programs, forming a coalition with community members was necessary. However, this did not imply creating political battles for faculty and other stakeholders in pursuit of personal recognition and control. In fact, the most respected administrators were those who consistently modeled the ideals of a professional culture and strove to build mutual trust between themselves and the faculty and among the faculty members. When schools drifted from their original school purpose, they were said to have lost their vision (Owens). Deal and Peterson (1999), Fullan (2001), and Senge (1990), therefore, advocated establishing a school-wide vision in order to ensure staying on course, unifying school practices, solidifying relationships, and helping to make coherence. Bandura (1993, 1997) called this culture that shared values and beliefs a normative culture.

School leaders also shaped school culture by the way they construed their role. School principals who construed their role as that of facilitator created better opportunities for establishing good relationships with their staff than those who construed their role as the directors. In a theory developed by Douglas McGregor (cited in Owens, 2001), McGregor illustrated how the underlying perceptions of a school administrator could hurt his or her relationship with the employees. McGregor labeled negative administrative perceptions as Theory X and positive administrative perceptions as Theory Y. McGregor maintained that administrators holding the viewpoints of Theory X were more likely to exhibit authoritarian form of control such as giving directives and demanding compliance, becoming coercive, and threatening to terminate employee's job as a way of amassing control. McGregor indicated that these types of leaders were less likely to relate well to their employees. This is how McGregor described the underlying assumptions of Theory X:

The average person inherently dislikes work and will avoid it whenever possible; (b) because people dislike work, they must be supervised closely, directed, coerced, or threatened with punishment in order for them to put adequate effort towards the achievement of organizational objectives; (c) the average worker will shirk responsibility and seek formal direction from those in charge; (d) most workers value job security above other job-related factors and have little ambition (Owens, 2001, p.67).

Many people would agree that schools with principals holding McGregor's Theory X would be characterized by low employee morale, resistance to orders, and conflict with and among the faculty members. School teachers in such schools were more likely to perform up to the expected requirement and no more. It may be important to point that there are leaders who visit their faculty classrooms with the goal of providing support as opposed to those who visit with the goal of emphasizing their superior role, that is, to create intimidation on the faculty. Because McGregor's assumptions for Theory Y were quite the opposite of those in Theory X,

their outcomes were also very different. In fact, the underlying assumptions for behavior pattern B under Theory Y deserve some recognition because of their potential to build a strong professional culture. These are some of the underlying assumptions of behavior pattern B in Theory Y:

.... most people in our culture, teachers among them, desire to contribute effectively and creatively to the accomplishment of worthwhile objectives. (b) Administrators should encourage teachers to participate in important as well as routine decisions. In fact, the more important a decision is to the school, the greater should be the administrator's efforts to tap faculty resources (Owens, p. 69).

As can be seen, these assumptions were likely to create a professional culture that was highly committed to the institutional goals and that was very collegial. Newmann and Associates (1996) acknowledged that some school had established a culture in which faculty members were highly committed and highly collegial with strong social support. In these cultures, research-based instructional programs were highly sought as well as faculty input into decision making. Many schools are now hiring highly qualified professionals. School administrators are beginning to understand the importance of tapping into their highly qualified professional resource for problem-solving strategies, for innovative ideas about instructional technologies, for on-line communication with parents, and for other decision-making strategies that support whole-staff professional programs or the individual teacher's growth plan. According to Owens (2001), this practice made administrative work easier and helped to create a better working environment. Although not all ideas suggested by faculty members finally became useful, the idea of tapping into professionals' expertise and allowing faculty contribution into various school decisions enabled them to develop a sense of ownership for their organization and to participate in other school activities voluntarily (Owens).

Like Newmann and Associates (1996), Hoy and Miskel (2005) asserted that effective schools were characterized by principal leadership with high expectations, an orderly school climate, instructional teachers' leadership, frequent monitoring of students' progress, and unique assessment procedures. Instructional teacher's leadership or teacher's quality included teacher's knowledge of the subject matter, of the curriculum and pedagogy, and of the presentational competence. It also included classroom management and teacher's ability to employ different assessment methods. Other factors that contributed to instructional teacher's leadership and that ensured continued improvement, assuming that the hiring processes ensured teachers knowledge of subject, curriculum, and pedagogy, were the school's professional development programs. Hoy and Miskel noted that well tailored professional development programs and collegial practices among teachers helped to diminish the gap arising from differences in the classroom instruction.

School leaders also shaped culture by the way they facilitated a learning culture. Senge (1990) and Fullan (2000) were probably the best advocates for a learning culture. In the U.S., the idea of a learning organization originated with Deming (2000) who began comparing the way corporate American firms operated differently from those in Japan. In the corporate world, businesses did better when employees were allowed to work together collaboratively, sharing job related ideas and solving job related problems. Some companies went further to ask their employees to contribute to ideas about how their firms' products or services could be improved. Adoption of these practices was credited with the creation of brilliant product ideas now in the market. Many companies also greatly improved their old products. Unfortunately, in the education setting, these strategies have taken long to achieve acknowledgement. However, some

administrators are beginning to catch up with the vision and are starting to support collegiality among faculties as well as faculty's contribution into decision making.

As was stated, Fullan (2001) maintained collegiality and collaborative practices as a knowledge building or a form of professional development. Teachers in the same grade level or same department collaborated in many ways including evaluating the curriculum, sharing strategies for presenting difficult concepts, or sharing new research-based techniques. Teachers who were technically savvy trained others, and those who were proficient in other areas shared that knowledge. These factors became useful in building a strong school culture and for supporting new teachers. Bandura (1993, 1997) indicated induction processes for new teachers were important for building their self-efficacy. Similarly, collaborative practices across departments improved school-wide relationships and promoted professional innovation across departments. Administrators in these cultures promoted brainstorming strategies as a means for determining best way to solve school-wide challenging problems; they encouraged school-wide research-based teaching strategies; they supported departmental planning time as a means for promoting exchange for ideas; and they provided time for cross curricular meetings to promote integrated curriculum projects. These administrators also encouraged debates for faculty ideas and they worked hard to bring about productive induction processes for new teachers.

Administrators who supported a professional culture also saw their faculty as the most important asset leading to the attainment of the school vision. Therefore, these leaders not only encouraged collegiality within the school, they also allocated funds for various professional development programs. Teachers attended important national conferences that focused on pedagogy in their subject areas or that supported individual teacher's growth plan. Some teachers

visited neighboring schools to make observations, for example, of a teaching strategy or for incorporating some instructional technology. Schools also offered appropriate whole-staff professional development workshops to support a school improvement strategy. The U.S Department of Education (2006) now considers ongoing professional development as crucial for ensuring continuous school improvement. Although all teachers were expected to be highly qualified by the year 2006, the idea of using professional development as an ongoing process for continuous school improvement was considered paramount. Because of this, all states now mandate that teachers fulfill some stipulated hours of professional development. As mentioned, the idea of learning institutions originated with Deming (2000). Deming advocated instituting training on the job in order to build quality into manufactured products. He also advocated breaking down the barriers so that all employees and their superiors could communicate. Hoy and Miskel (2005) emphasized that “schools should be provided assistance to build their capability for delivering improved education,” (p.285).

School leaders also shaped school culture by the degree to which they supported and encouraged instructional technology in their schools. Technology can be used in many ways. Some technologies assisted students in virtual learning, others in the simulation of objects so that students could develop a better understanding of a concept, others allowed students to assume the role of a teacher through class presentations, while yet others aided in media communication between faculty, parents, and students. Technology was also used to support students’ research projects, to publish students’ work, and as a communication tool for exchanging geographic or plant biology ideas between students in different countries. These practices made technology quite useful in education (Levin & Arafah, 2005). As mentioned, in those schools where

professional culture was practiced, teachers who were technically savvy were allowed time to train others about how to incorporate certain technologies into classroom instruction (Fullan, 2001).

School administrators also shaped school culture by the degree they accentuated parental involvement. Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized that “only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will [the] education flourish” (p.132). A study completed by Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that involving parents in the education of their children improved students’ behavior and achievement. These factors translated to improved attendance rate, lower dropout rate, higher graduation rate, and consequently higher college-going rate. Of course, the nature of parental involvement depended on the emphasis in school policies. Further, elementary school-age parents were involved in the learning of their children in a different way from those in high schools. High school parents supported the education of their children through decision making about curriculum options, they supported choices between the college-taking path and the vocational, they emphasized student’s completion of homework or provided transportation in the after school tutoring, and they supported positive student behavior and general attitude towards school. Therefore, keeping the line of communication between the parents and the school through the Internet or phone was considered very important.

Finally, school administrators shaped school culture by the degree they helped create meaning and showed the interconnections of the various school practices and traditions. Fullan (2001), therefore, emphasized this other important component of a school culture, ‘making coherence’. Making coherence highlighted the need for showing the rational behind the various school undertakings outside the teacher’s primary role. As mentioned, making coherence



involved creating meanings or the reasoning behind school practices such as the school events, support for collaborative activities, support for professional development programs, support for parental involvement, support for classroom technology, support for the cross curriculum projects, and support for the many other school activities outside the teachers' realm of requirement. The goal would be to show the connection between the school activities and the school vision or the school goal so that everyone is on the same page. Therefore, reiterating and articulating the school vision and showing how it is connected to students' achievement and performance, how it supports students' attendance and reduce dropout rate, and how it improves the college-going rate would be important.

Although literature in the area of school culture is increasing, there is a need to continue investigating the role school culture plays in supporting students' motivation to learn, students' motivation to complete high school, and students' motivation to continue with postsecondary education. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of high school teachers and principals about what constitutes an effective school culture for supporting students' continuation to higher education. Exploration of these viewpoints was expected to help develop a theoretical framework by which important aspects of an effective school culture could be discovered. Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicated that the process of generating qualitative grounded theory was better suited for studying cultural phenomena because of its ability to provide thick, descriptive information for explaining important cultural elements. This was the reason a qualitative study for this dissertation was preferred over a quantitative study.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHOD

#### *Introduction*

The intent of this study was to develop a theoretical framework to explain the characteristics of effective high school cultures in supporting students' college-going rates. Development of the theoretical framework was achieved through examining the perceptions of teachers and principals about what constitutes an effective school culture for enhancing higher college-going rates. The overarching question addressed in the study was: What were the characteristics of school cultures that became effective in supporting high school student college-going rate? To answer this question, the process of building a grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was used. According to Strauss and Corbin grounded theory involves a systematic comparison of data and construction of an explanatory scheme that integrates various concepts into statements of relationships.

#### *Research Design*

Six high schools in northeast Tennessee were selected for the development of the theoretical framework. Permission to carry out the study was first obtained from the school districts in which the selected high schools were and from the school principals. In order to ensure the selection of participants who had knowledge about the research topic, the sampling criterion for this study was purposeful. To identify potential volunteers for each selected high school, the researcher requested assistance from administrative staff for a list containing teachers' names, email addresses, gender, and years of service. From this list the researcher came up with a purposeful criterion for incorporating male and female teachers with at least 10+ years

of teaching experience. The researcher also obtained the free period for each potential volunteer in order to request an interview during those free hours. School principals or assistant principals from each selected high school were also identified as potential participants. Although a maximum of six teachers, plus the principal, were required from each school, about 10 teachers were identified for each school in case a replacement was needed. Emails explaining the purpose and significance of the study were then sent to potential volunteers requesting their participation. On-site visitation by the researcher followed these emails with the goal of determining which potential volunteers could participate and which could not. For most volunteers, the researcher used their free period to request an interview.

### *Interviews*

Data were collected on the school site through one-to-one interviews with volunteering participants. Forty-five one-to-one interviews were actually completed in this study. However, only 43 interviews were useful. In one interview, the recorder was accidentally off during the entire interview and only the introduction was recorded. In another interview, background noise that was not apparent to be loud during the interview made it hard to understand the conversation. All teachers who agreed to interview were interviewed except one who missed because of a snow day. One principal was also unavailable for the interview, but the assistant principal had agreed to be interviewed instead. Because some participants repeated comments that had already been stated in a very distinct manner by others, not every name was included in the data analysis. Table 1 shows all the 45 participants by their pseudonyms and by the pseudonyms of their school.

At the commencement of each interview, the researcher reiterated the purpose and significance of the study and discussed informed consent. The informed consent stipulated the volunteers' right to withdraw from the study at any time and also assured participating volunteers that their names or any identifier connecting them to the study would not be used in the data analysis or in the publication of the study. Participants were informed that signing the form acknowledged voluntary participation. Each volunteer was given a moment to make this decision. Prior to each interview, permission to record the conversation and for the researcher to make memo notes during the interview was obtained from the volunteers. Although the researcher was expected to stop the recorder periodically and ask the volunteering participant if he or she wanted to continue or would prefer to withdraw without penalty, this step was eliminated in order to minimize interruptions. Instead, participants were informed that they could express desire to stop the researcher any moment during the interview. As can be expected, teachers' free breaks are very brief and schools often experience short interruptions from the intercoms. Therefore, to optimize the interviewing time, participants were informed that they could interrupt the researcher any time and express their desire not to continue with interview. Participants were assured that if they chose to discontinue, what was already recorded would be discarded immediately.

To ensure confidentiality of participants, all participants were given pseudonyms. As much as possible, pseudonyms were picked from English names that were gender neutral. The six schools were also named after some common trees. The six names used for schools were: Cherry High School, Dogwood High School, Magnolia High School, Maple High School, Oak

High School, and Walnut High School. Table 1 shows the pseudonyms of participants, their job title, school, and gender.

During the interview, the researcher tried to frame the questions in different ways in order to determine the actual meaning the participants were trying to convey. In qualitative research, responses given for one question often dictate the manner in which the following question would be framed. Probing was used to gain clarification of ideas. In this study, the researcher used the probing technique in an attempt to achieve two goals. First, the researcher tried to develop a clear understanding about what was actually happening in the school or about the present culture of a school. Second, the researcher tried to conceptualize a holistic picture about what the teachers and principals were conveying regarding the ideal culture for supporting student learning and student college-going rates. However, even though the researcher was able to delineate what was going on in schools, the goal was not to compare leadership performance unfavorably against one another. Rather, the goal was to provide insights as to what was important in a school culture to support student learning, retention, and achievement and influence higher level of college-going rate. In fact, it was not possible to compare the performance of one leader with another given that (a) some schools were better funded than others; (b) some schools had a larger population of vocational students while some focused mainly on the academics; (c) some schools were very large, such that the impact of new initiatives by their principals took time to be acknowledged; and (d) some principals had not been in the schools long enough to impact a culture that truly reflected their values. Actually, out of the six schools that were used in the study, four of the principals were very new with only 1 to 2 years in the school. Therefore, the culture of the schools they were running was still a

reflection of another principal, not theirs. Below, Table 1 shows the pseudonyms of participants, their job title, school, and gender.

Table 1

*Participants Data*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Kerry	Principal	Maple High School	M
Terry	Teacher	Maple High School	M
Jamie	Teacher	Magnolia High School	F
Morgan	Teacher	Magnolia High School	F
Desiree	Teacher	Cherry High School	F
Hayden	Teacher	Oak High School	M
Cade	Teacher	Oak High School	F
Alex	Principal	Oak High School	F
Pat	Teacher	Oak High School	F
Bayle	Teacher	Walnut High School	F
Dylan	Teacher	Oak High School	M
Devin	Teacher	Oak High School	M
Sandy	Teacher	Oak High School	F
Kris	Teacher	Maple High School	M
Jody	Teacher	Maple High School	F
Logan	Teacher	Maple High School	M
Shannon	Teacher	Dogwood High School	M
Bobbie	Teacher	Dogwood High School	F
Tracy	Teacher	Dogwood High School	F
Carmen	Teacher	Walnut High School	M
Chuck	Assist. Principal	Walnut High School	M
Shawn	Principal	Cherry High School	M
Jowie	Teacher	Cherry High School	F
Dominique	Principal	Dogwood High School	M
Frankie	Principal	Magnolia High School	M
Skyler	Teacher	Magnolia High School	M
Robbie	Teacher	Maple High School	F
Rikki	Assist. Principal	Dogwood High School	M
Tyler	Teacher	Dogwood High School	F
Jessie	Teacher	Oak High School	F
Kim	Teacher	Dogwood High School	M
Riley	Teacher	Dogwood High School	M
Kasey	Teacher	Walnut High School	F
Jackie	Assist. Principal	Cherry High School	F
Adrian	Assist. Principal	Magnolia High School	F

(Table 1 continued)

*Participants Data*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Gale	Teacher	Walnut High School	F
Brede	Teacher	Cherry High School	F
Carroll	Teacher	Cherry High School	M
Alivia	Teacher	Magnolia High School	M
Bill	Teacher	Cherry High School	F
Dee	Teacher	Walnut High School	F
Sam	Teacher	Maple High School	F
Ashton	Teacher	Walnut High School	M
Justin	Teacher	Dogwood High School	F
Jaylin	Teacher	Walnut High School	F

*Recruiting Protocols*

As was mentioned and as is typical of grounded theory, the selection of participants was guided by purposeful sampling criteria and was not intended to be random. The selection was, however, equitable for all of those potential participants who matched the sampling criteria. The sampling criteria for the purposeful sample were: (a) variation of males and females, (b) at least 10 years of teaching experience, and (c) employment of teachers in high schools in northeast Tennessee. The goal was to interview at least five teachers from each of the selected six high schools. Selected high schools were located in northeast Tennessee.

Letters were first emailed to school principals and the appropriate school districts officials explaining the purpose and the significance of the study and requesting permission to use their schools for the study. See the letter of attachment to school principals and the district officer at Appendix C. For each selected high school, the researcher obtained assistance from administrative staff for names of potential faculty volunteers with at least 10 years of service, their email addresses, a confirmation of their gender, and hours when these could be free to

interview. See the sampling criteria for the purposeful sample above. Teachers with at least 10 years or more in service were given opportunity to participate.

After emails were sent, a follow-up visit by the researcher with a copy of the email letter proceeded after duration of 1 to 2 days. During this visit, the researcher took time to explain in person the purpose and significance of the study, about the IRB guidelines regarding participants' rights and protections, and the researcher's assurance to commit to those IRB guidelines. By providing this information up front, the researcher was hoping to solicit voluntary participation. In the process, the researcher also gained insights as to who would be willing to participate and who would not. The email on Appendix D served as the letter of request for teachers to participate in the study. Each participant was emailed a thank you note after the interview for participating in the study.

#### *Interview Guide*

Although the researcher had developed an interview sample for both the principals and teachers, see Appendices A and B, the actual interviews followed a semi-structured format. Responses to a particular question dictated the way the following question was framed. Interviews were conversational in nature and they were recorded for accuracy and reliability. The semi-structured interviews focused on the main questions but relied on probing to ensure clarity and accuracy of data. All volunteering participants were given a copy of the main questions during interviews in order to think ahead, but they were also informed that probing questions would be included. Each participant had the privilege of suggesting the room for the interview. Most interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes.



### *Interview Logistics*

All interviews were conducted on the school site and as much as possible at the convenience of each participant. See above about how the interviews were conducted.

### *Ethical Protocol*

It was imperative to show ethical considerations for all participants, especially in the areas of respect of subjects, beneficence, and justice. Adherence to these areas constituted ethical practices. The responsibility of providing informed consent with the rights of participants rested on the researcher. This step served as respect for subjects and assured participants that the researcher was committed to following ethical guidelines during the interviews and in the overall study. Explaining the purpose and significance of the study also served as respect, but it mainly provided the rationale for beneficence. Because there were no foreseeable physical or mental risks associated with this study, volunteering participants were provided with this information up front. In addition, informing participants of the right to withdraw from the study without penalty and assuring them of anonymity of their identity as well as that of their school served as respect for participants and protection of their confidentiality. Moreover, all other important information, including terms for breaking confidentiality, use of direct quotes without identifying the speaker, the process of using member check to ensure validity and reliability of data, and the general benefits of the study were all reiterated at the commencement of each interview. Justice was served through equitable matching of potential participants in the sampling criteria.

## *Data Analysis*

### *Interviews*

The analysis of data in this grounded study was guided by the six steps of Strauss and Corbin (1998) in the constant comparison of data for analysis. The six steps were designed to assist researchers in the interpretation of data. To ensure incorporation of these steps, all 45 interviews, including those that were not useful, were saved as digital data on the researcher's lap-top. These audio data were then used in the process of constant, comparative data analysis. By reviewing each audio interview over and over again while taking notes, emerging patterns and their categories began to emanate from the interviewees' own statements. This process guided the construction of the theoretical framework of the cultural phenomenon that was being investigated.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) the first step of constant, comparison data analysis was the microscopic examination of the data. During this step, a careful listening of each interview in its entirety in order to capture distinctive pieces of the whole was accomplished. Key phrases or meaningful quotes that highlighted distinct pieces of data were noted. These meaningful words or phrases were jotted down to be evaluated later as concealed patterns or subcategories. The researcher also added memo statements below these meaningful phrases to guide in future references or to assist in close examination of each statement as a category or subcategory of the data.

In the second step of open coding, the researcher tried to break data into discrete parts. Here, key phrases that related to the intent of study were closely reexamined and compared with others to determine their unique property as distinctive cultural concepts. Descriptive notes

identifying these key phrases as emerging categories or subcategories of the cultural phenomenon were also added to guide in the continued evaluation of additional data. In the third step, the axial coding, the researcher began putting pieces of data back together based on some common threads or common meanings. This step involved examining discrete words or phrases to determine how well they related to each other. Direct quotes revealing relationships of distinct words or phrases were transcribed. Conversely, instead of transcribing each interview in its entirety and then extracting important quotes from the transcripts, the researcher transcribed useful quotes directly from the digital recordings. Only those statements that revealed portions of categories or subcategory of the cultural phenomenon being investigated were transcribed. Similarly, instead of sending discrete transcribed interviews to sample participants as member check, the researcher sent Chapter 4 to 15 members, which served as the member check. Chapter 4 contained the analyzed data.

The fourth step involved selective coding or patterning. Here, identified categories with their subcategories were combined into themes that were formed around a central theoretical construct or framework. The goal was to have a theoretical framework that explained the important parts of a cultural phenomenon with the highest potential for influencing college-going rates. Because the fifth step required showing the interrelationship of the concepts in the theoretical framework, the significant of each concept identified as an important property in the school culture for supporting student learning and student college-going rates was reexamined.

In the sixth level, a graph showing the visual relationship around a theoretical framework was formulated. This graphical representation was included in Chapter 4.

### *Quality and Verification*

External validity in qualitative research refers to the accuracy of the findings. This implies examining to see if the instrument measured what it was meant to measure based on the research question. In qualitative research, this is referred to as the external validity. Appendixes A and B show the nature of the interview questions as they related to the concepts about school culture and as construed from the literature review. Internal validity, on the other hand, refers to the ability of data to provide a measure of what it was intended to measure, which translates to the accuracy or the authenticity of the finding. For this qualitative grounded theory, internal validity was achieved in three ways. First, the investigator developed a sampling criterion that ensured maximum variation of the purposeful participants' sample, second, the investigator employed multi-site for data collection, and third, the investigator used a member check to ensure authenticity of their information and accuracy in the interpretation.

### *Ensuring Internal and External Validity*

The process of evaluating data as a qualitative researcher poses some problems. The fact that the researcher is the primary instrument in the data collection and analysis, the fact that qualitative researchers compare data and try to make sense of the informants' viewpoint, and the fact that they make judgments of the data all make these processes subjective, as opposed to using objectivity to analyze data. As a result, qualitative researchers employ some check up mechanism such as using an external auditor or using member check to ensure internal validity of their study. In this study, the process of member check was used to evaluate the authenticity of participants' statements, to check for possible biases in the interpretation of their words, and to solicit their recommendation. Fifteen members drawn from the sample were used as the member

check. The 15 members were picked from those whose statements had been used the most. These were requested to read the entire Chapter 4 in order to assess the authenticity of their statements and to criticize researcher's interpretation of their words as well as the rationality used in the construction of the theoretical framework. They were also requested to pinpoint possible biases and to make recommendations as deemed necessary. A graphical representative or the visual interrelationships of the concepts identified in this study was included at the end of Chapter 4. Similarly, these copies have been included in the following appendices: a copy of the semi-structured interview guide to school principal at Appendix A; a copy of the semi-structured interview guide to teachers at Appendix B; a copy of the letter emailed to the school district and principal at Appendix C; a copy of the letter emailed to individual teachers at Appendix D; and a copy of the informed consent contract at Appendix F. As mentioned, external validity was ensured by the nature of the interview questions that were asked.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee. The goal was to develop a grounded theory for explaining the characteristics of such culture as defined by high school teachers and principals in the region. Accordingly, the study identified five fundamental characteristics essential for successful school cultures. These five basic characteristics were (a) communicating high expectation to all stakeholders, (b) building a strong learning community, (c) promoting positive partnership with parents, (d) establishing partnership with local industries, colleges, and universities, (e) focusing on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education. To improve the understanding of the study findings, each factor characteristic was introduced first and discussed before adding participants' comments that support the finding. Each factor was also expanded to show its categories and subcategories. A visual, graphic representation of the theoretical framework showing the interrelationships of the concepts was included at the end of this chapter.

#### *Communicating High Expectations to All Stakeholders*

This study indicated that leaders needed to communicate high expectations to all stakeholders. However, high expectations needed to be combined with support for stakeholders and especially for teachers and students to maximize their potential to achieve the high goals. Administrators also needed to require accountability from all stakeholders and they needed to help 'make coherence'. As explained under the definition of terms, making coherence referred to the state of increasing the general understanding for stakeholders by helping show congruency,

the rationale behind the various school activities and the school vision. It also implied showing consistency of the values being upheld. Failing to show coherence created low teacher morale.

In addition, high expectation needed to incorporate appreciation for teachers' hard work. Teachers become emotionally stressed, especially when working with difficult students or parents. Therefore, support for teachers included teacher appreciation, material resources so that teachers could be well-prepared, and teachers' developmental growth programs. In fact, school leaders could not truly become effective in establishing strong school cultures without the backing of the state and national government. Support from these government bodies was crucial. It was also necessary for states to relinquish some control over schools in order to promote site-based decision-making, increase teachers' input into decision making, and increase support for teachers' developmental growth programs. Further, schools needed support from these government bodies in their endeavors to promote parental involvement. Although some of the needs brought up by teachers in this study required funding, others simply required better communication and understanding. Therefore, this section about communicating high expectations to all stakeholders included: (i) Setting the tone for high expectations and providing support, (ii) High expectation and accountability, and (iii) Helping to make coherence.

#### *Setting the Tone for High Expectations and Providing Support*

As mentioned, the study revealed high expectations needed to be accompanied by support for all stakeholders, especially for teachers. Almost all the teachers and principals who were interviewed indicated that school principals played a major role in influencing the school culture by setting the tone for high expectations for all stakeholders, by providing needed support, by requiring accountability, and by helping to make coherence. In regard to the role administrators

played in creating a learning environment with a high expectation for all stakeholders, principal

Kerry said this,

I believe the principal more than any one other person sets the tone in the school; and it's been surprising to me this year, being in a new setting as a principal that I believe that's true of any school size. ... I have seen a lot of evidence that that's true in either setting. Now it may not influence as quickly in [a] large school as it does in a small, but - it's very important.

Kerry also emphasized that collaborative support should be part of the school climate,

It is the responsibility of administrators to create a climate, an atmosphere in which people feel supported and supportive, to work one-on-one with each other, and to help each other and to share. To share not only materials, but also frustrations, hopes, ideas, and motivation.

Related to this discussion about high expectation and teachers' support, Jamie, a teacher, said,

Administrators set the school culture in many ways. I think that teachers feed off what's the expectation in the culture just as students feed off what we expect of them. So if you don't have much expectation, then a lot of people will not be intrinsically motivated to do it on their own.

Similarly Morgan, another teacher, stated,

I think high expectations should be set by the school administrators. It's a [form of] respect ... the administrative team presents to the teachers. When they are having those expectations of the teachers then I think [they are modeling and this] is passed down to teachers. Then teachers pass it down to students. And you know you keep that same consistency and you pride, and always try to remind again what we are trying to do, what successes we are trying to achieve, what our vision is, what our goals are, what our short term goals are, and what our long term goals are.

Many researchers such as Fullan (2001), Owens (2001), and Senge (1990) support Morgan's comments about reiterating the vision or the goals of the organization so that stakeholders could find reasons to commit to those goals or to the vision. Celebrating organizational success, as became apparent, was also very important as well as trying to incorporate stakeholders' input into decision making. Seeking stakeholders' input, especially



from teachers, enabled them to develop a sense of ownership and to incorporate their needs. This helped to strengthen the working relationship. Therefore, the vision or the school goals needed to be understood by all so that everyone could contribute ideas. Continuing with high expectations, Terry, a teacher, emphasized the need for schools to remain consistent and to follow through.

This is what Terry said,

An ideal school climate for learning would be where we have high expectations for students, we treat students fairly and we follow through. I think many times we move the negative consequences from the student, and we are paying for that. And I don't mean just behavior ... we plop up our students and tell them they are fine until they hit the world. ... I think we need to show tough love for some students.

Terry also stated that principals played a major role in keeping teachers accountable and in encouraging those who performed exemplary work. In fact, the quality of teachers' work improved while working with leaders who were highly committed to high standards. Terry explained,

An effective administrator should be able to tell you what's going on in your classroom, and in order to do that, [he or she has] to be in the classrooms. ... I think a good administrator knows what the teachers are doing and can hold them accountable. In my 18 years of teaching, I had two, and I have had wonderful, wonderful principals. I can cite a lot of good examples of administrators [that] I have worked with [and] that I have admired. I have two out of I guess seven ... that were in my room once a week, [that] if nothing else, would be just their presence. Now in doing so they were doing a couple of things that helped me to be more effective. Number one, they held me accountable because if I was doing something off task I was not likely to do that if my boss was coming by; and I wanted to be successful. I think if nothing else, that person helps teachers [who] are out of line. But for me, it added a lot of credit for the positive feedback they gave; it sure meant a lot if they were in my room and saw what I was doing.

Desiree, who was also a teacher, acknowledged the need for showing consistency, for following through, and for leadership to model best practices. Desiree defined ideal school climate in terms of highly structured school environment that was conducive to student learning and that

promoted accountability. Desiree insisted that all stakeholder, including teachers, parents, the para-educators, as well as the staff, needed to be fully involved and that principals were the most responsible for establishing this type of school culture. Further, if principals were to expect such quality performance from teachers and other stakeholders, then they too needed to provide a personal model by being supportive, and, above all, by maintaining consistency, and following through. Desiree stated,

I am a very structured person... Therefore a school climate to me would definitely have to be very structured. I have problems with tardy, I have problem with students being ill prepared, and therefore, if I were an administrator I would have problems with teachers being ill prepared. I would have problems with teachers not holding students accountable for what they do in class and not having high expectations for them. ... I also think that the actual hierarchy has to start with the upper level administration, from the head principal down to the assistants and any staff, and I am not talking of totalitarian or dictatorship type of a person. Administrators need to [treat their] staff and faculty [with] respect and then they in return [would] be respectful of them.

Desiree went on to say,

Administrators need to set policies; ... then the teachers [will] know this is what is expected of me; this is not what is expected of me, then it can be followed through. And I am pushing the "big back it up". Don't write it down if you are not going to back it up! And [please] don't give me a hundred pages of policy, give me a few and say this is what we are going to do; this is the way it's going to be handled, and back it up.

Gale, another teacher, also emphasized the need for showing consistency with the school rules and standards,

[Our system need to have] standards [that are] the same for everybody and enforce the rules that we have. We have a school board that gives us directive rules [but] how many times they are not enforced. And [if] they are not enforced then they are useless. ... I think students need to know what is expected of them and when they know that, then that's how they will behave. But if they know they can get away with this in this class and that in another class and [that] it just depends on which teacher sees you, then kids will push you to the limit.... So it's important for students to know this is what you can do and this is what you cannot do, and it has to be consistent.

Hayden, another high school teacher, stated that an ideal school climate was one in which there were high expectations and all stakeholders understood those high expectations. Hayden said,

... but the ideal situation of a school would be on something like what we have here actually. It should be a small school. A school that has high expectations and every one knows that the school has high expectations. And those high expectations are generated by the actual combinations of all stakeholders, including myself, teachers, administrations, parents and actually the key, the key are the students. If the students have high expectations of what they are going to do, of what they are about to get themselves into, I can't put it in their terms; that's probably the key to a successful school. And to get that to happen takes for some schools a lot of work; for schools like ours, it's just been tradition. And that's - that's what I said earlier on [that] it's difficult to establish a tradition.

In fact, Hayden's perception that a small size school helped to enhance the elements of a strong school culture was also echoed by other teachers and principals during this study.

Although Kerry maintained that effective communication, regardless of the school size, was the most effective factor, this study, as well as other previous studies, seems to indicate that small schools had an advantage over large schools in terms of providing personal support to students. It would be easier for small schools to monitor each student's progress aggressively and to provide a one-to-one support for students than large schools. Reinforcing cultural elements may also take longer in large schools than it would in small ones.

Hayden also accentuated the benefits of school tradition with high expectations for all stakeholders at Oak High School, to which Cade concurred. Cade, another high school teacher, agreed with Hayden that the tone of high expectations requiring participation from all stakeholders at Oak High School was what enabled students to achieve better grades. This is what Cade explained,

The fact that the school has a report card that is all As ... sets high expectations for the students. The fact that [students] know that they will graduate from here [also] sets high

expectations. They realize ... that their degree will mean more to most universities than other degrees. ... So that sets high expectations on them.

As Hayden and Cade indicated, establishing a school tradition that consistently communicated high expectations for all stakeholders was a critical factor in school culture. Many teachers at the Oak High School reported that their school allowed teachers great autonomy to make many choices and to have an input towards the school improvement programs.

Nevertheless, every stakeholder had to play his or her role effectively. Alex, the school's principal, explained that the teachers, parents, and even the students were all engaged in a concerted effort to monitor and build students' success by communicating high expectations for students' performance, by putting those students who were failing on contracts that allowed them to receive individualized support, by providing students services that maximized their potential to achieve the high goals, and by helping correct those student's habits that were deemed inappropriate or that weakened their performance, for instance, not doing homework. These practices were significant. In fact, demanding high performance from students, teachers, or even parents without providing support defeated the purpose and increased stakeholders' frustrations.

Alex explained,

I have high expectations for the teachers. They in turn have high expectations for the students and I think that's shown through what they teach; how [they] feel accountable through their testing and whether or not the students are learning. Again of course, our report card shows that our kids are learning. [This] means that the teachers are obviously displaying those high expectations [for students] in the classroom or else we wouldn't [be] see[ing] that same triple effect. Teachers have high expectations [for students] and the parents, same way. If there is a student struggling, we usually meet with the parent, the student, and the teacher. [We] discuss [and] do a contract. A contract is a plan of how we can make sure our students are successful. ... We sit for about 30 minutes and say here is what we have available at the Oak High School. We have the after school tutoring; it's free.

The after-school tutoring that was free indicated to students that they were not simply required to produce quality work without being provided relevant support. Moreover, the concerted effort to monitor each student's progress, the ability to draw contracts with failing students and to raise their support from all sides, especially from the parents, and the ability to provide students with a second chance all added to the bundle of support students received in their endeavor to meet the high goals. The fact that students could turn in late work for half credit indicated they were being offered opportunities to improve academically. Alex indicated that students were trained to monitor their own progress and to take responsibility,

When a child is not doing his homework we come up with a plan of how the parent can set up the home so that that child can be successful. ... If we have a student failing, [lets say in] English, there is really nothing that the English teacher can do. ... But we do what's called the touch-base station. That student has at the end of the day to ask the teacher two questions: What am I missing, and what's coming up this week? ... If a child is not [making points], that's one way they can go to the teacher and say, "Did I not hand in something this week? ... Most of them have a day to get it in and they get late credit for it. They can get half credit or up to 70% on what they didn't hand in. ... Midterms get sent home every 4½ weeks. ... They [indicate] whether or not [a] child has a 'D' or an 'F' in a class. If they have an 'F' the parent knows they are going to have to come in for a meeting. If they have a 'D' it's an alarm, okay, you know something is not right. So we do a lot of monitoring of student progress. That pretty much says we have pretty high expectations. But we don't just have those expectations. We do what we can [to support students].

In general, the one-to-one support for each student at Oak High School was what translated to the report card with all As. Alex described it this way, "[The state] report card is pretty much a good accountability that shows what has happened. We've gone from 'C', 'D', and 'Fs' when I first got here to now straight 'As' on the report card, two years in a row".

Alex was supporting the idea that communicating high expectations to all stakeholders in schools translated to students' high performance. High student performance, in turn, helped to strengthen students' self-efficacy about their potential to successfully embark on more

challenging things in life and, for the purpose of this study, to continue with higher education. However, in addition to communicating high expectations, education should seek to nurture the best out of every student and to inspire students to become the best they can be. Alex's school nurtured important qualities in students by providing them with opportunities. These opportunities enabled students to self-correct wrong behaviors or bad habits, to monitor their progress, and to take responsibility. They also helped to instill positive social values. The second factor, students' monitoring their success, was achieved by allowing students to talk to their teachers when they began getting a failing grade and to seek ways to pull up a bad grade. This factor also enabled students to learn to prioritize their time in order to accommodate deadlines. In real life, students will be expected to take responsibility of their situations in life and they will be expected to find solutions for those problems. In addition, students were allowed a second chance. Allowing students a second chance provided them room for improvement and self-correction, but it also held the potential of motivating students to strive higher so as to avoid pleading for second chances in future. Providing students with second chance also enabled them to develop value for empathy. Although this may not seem like an important factor, some of the problems we have in society and in schools are that children and adults were never taught how to empathize with others. This problem sometimes translates to bigger problems, especially when students begin to interpret everything in the form of competition and power. Even though competition has its place in life, it is important that students learn to become balanced. Alex comments are repeated here to emphasize the nurturing aspect, important for all students,

[When a child is not making points because of] not doing his homework ... [that child could] go to the teacher and say, "Did I not hand in something this week? ... Most of them have a day to get it in and they get late credit for it. They can get half credit or up to 70% on what they didn't hand in. ... Midterms [indicate] whether or not [a] child has a

'D' or an 'F' in a class. If they have a 'D' it's an alarm, okay, you know something is not right. ... So we do a lot of monitoring of student progress. But we don't just have those expectations. We will do what we can do to [support students].

Carroll, a teacher, spoke about the need to form a coalition,

You need to have the students, you need to have the teachers; you need to have the administrators; you need to have all the stakeholders [forming] coalition, pulling for the same goal. As long as [everyone is] committed to the same goal, and as long as each perceives others [as belonging] to that goal, then I think you will have a successful learning environment because everyone will realize that no one is out to get them; they are out to help them. ... I think it's going to take a group effort from all parties [to do that]. ... Definitely it will take the parents [who] need to have value for education. It need good, well trained, committed, and I emphasize committed teachers and administrators.

In summary, setting the tone for high expectation required providing a climate that was supportive to all stakeholders. This support could be in the form of allowing teachers' autonomy to share ideas, establishing programs and policies that supported instruction and school's goals, opening tutoring support for students, and counseling parents about how to support their children education.

### *High Expectations and Accountability*

As mentioned, teachers' input into decision making was an important factor of the school culture. However, if teachers were to be empowered to make suggestions for school decisions, for example about the type of professional development that would best meet their individual growth plans, and if they were to expect to be treated as professionals, then they should also expect to be held accountable. In fact, Terry asserted that teachers needed to be empowered and be treated like professionals and be held accountable. Terry put it this way,

To me, I think teachers are not empowered, I feel there is a little bit of a- yes, we want to be professional, but yet in that regard we are treated like, like- You wonder why we are not allowed to negotiate. ... I think teachers should certainly be given freedom to determine what's going to benefit them the most. And maybe they (administrators) want

to stretch it a little bit, maybe they want to say, we need to work on students' writing. Fine, but give them [teachers] freedom to suggest how.

Terry went on to say,

So I think things like that should be able to be negotiated, and I feel like that's an area where we ought to free teachers up to say, here is where I think I am going to benefit and hold them accountable.

In the same way, Desiree emphasized teachers' accountability through the viewpoint on the highly structured school environment. In fact, Desiree emphasized that when principals took what they referred to as the 'Picture Ed' (school educational picture), that was the moment they needed to remind teachers what was expected of them and to hold them accountable,

When I walk to your classroom, this is what I expect to see; this is what I don't expect to see. And I think when you tell somebody, just like we as teachers, we are supposed to set the classroom policy; then the students know what to expect. Then I think administrators need to set policies ... then the teachers [will] know this is what is expected of me; this is not what is expected of me, then it can be followed through.

Desiree also emphasized that accountability should begin from the top level to the subordinate in the lower level, "I also think that the actual hierarchy has to start with the upper level administration, from the head principal down to the assistants, parents, and I think any staff." In a similar way, Cade indicated that at Oak High School teachers were empowered to determine best teaching style that ensured students success in meeting the state's standards. "Well, I think that as long as we meet the standards of the state of Tennessee, we are all free to teach in whichever way we want." Devin, another teacher at Oak High School, also expressed ability to exercise teachers' autonomy by being able to choose class curriculum while maintaining high quality work. In fact, Devin acknowledged that, "A decent level of rigorous curricula should not be the amount of work students do in order to prepare for college, but the quality of work."



Therefore, Devin connected the privilege to exercise autonomy with accountability to produce high quality work. Devin described the autonomy to choose this way,

I think that in this school I have a lot of freedom in terms of curriculum development, and no one is looking over my back to make sure that I am teaching a certain [way]. I feel I am empowered to determine which section of the text book, for example, are the most critical and which section of the textbook, if we have time to cover we can, but if we don't have time to cover we don't get to it.

Alex, on the other hand, emphasized teachers' accountability by reminding teachers that their decisions had either a positive or negative impact on students. Therefore, Alex encouraged teachers to look for research-based solutions. While responding to the question whether teachers contribution were sought in decision making, Alex said,

Actually they make the decisions. Well, they are not the deciding factor- I told my teachers, don't come to me with a problem; come to me with a solution. So that lets me say okay, they thought it through. They know what needs to happen and they are coming to say could we please make this happen. Now what I do is I will ask them to sometimes base their decisions on research. What research is out there; what best practices they think will work so that students can be successful. It's not what is good for the teacher but how does that impact the students. That's the bottom line. That's why we are here. ... How is it going to impact the student? How are they going to [become] much better citizens when they leave Oak High School because you decided that's what you want to do? ... You [the teacher] know what the kids need; you know what you need to make [them get there]. So what is it; is it in my power to give you that? I mean look; do I have the money; do we have the space? It's up to you then to make it work. You come to me and tell me it's going to work, then it better work. You got the ownership of it. But I better see [that] there is accountability, accountability in student learning.

Devin also indicated that teachers needed to be held accountable for the way they spent those hours designated for individual growth plans. For example, it was possible for some teachers to fail to use this time wisely in those schools where these hours were provided. In regard to the way some teachers chose to use their individual growth plan time, Devin said,

Some states determine the number of hours a teacher should put towards professional development, which in some cases many teachers get the required

points by looking at what is the most efficient way to get the points instead of what professional development best meet their need.

In summary, setting high expectations for all stakeholders went hand in hand with the requirement to hold them accountable. For example, treating teachers as professionals and empowering them to participate in various school decisions necessitated holding them accountable. Therefore, empowering teachers to have input into decision making, allowing them time to collaborate, allowing them the autonomy to choose professional development that best suits their individual needs, and the autonomy to determine best alternative method for assessing students' performance all necessitated holding teachers accountable. Similarly, providing parents and student support systems also necessitated holding them accountable.

#### *Helping Make Coherence*

Fullan (2001) emphasized the need for seeking to make coherence. As explained in Chapter 1, helping to make coherence implied providing a general understanding of what is going on in the organization and the reasoning behind different organizational practices. Therefore, helping make coherence could imply showing how the various school activities related to the school vision. It implied showing congruency and consistency in the values school upheld, the type of programs school supported, and the manner or degree teachers and students were supported, and it implied showing congruency between school policies and the school vision. Coherence making helped to improve working relationships.

Incorporating stakeholders into the overarching vision and involving faculty in decision making increased their understanding of the nature of school needs and helped to improve coherence. It also helped develop a sense of ownership and commitment in them. Conversely, when teachers and students failed to see meaning in what they were doing, they attributed those

extra activities to busywork, which had a negative impact and created low morale. On the other hand, incorporating faculty into decision made them feel appreciated and enabled them to willingly support the school vision and projects. In fact, seeking students' input about ways they learn better and employing different teaching styles in their instruction produced similar sense of student ownership of their learning and increased student motivation to learn. It is possible for an organization to appear successful and yet exhibit weaknesses of the inner relationships.

In the interviews, some teachers spoke about how a lack of teamwork among committee members killed teacher morale. Others talked about a lack of support for their endeavors to foster high student performance within their classes, while others spoke about their leaders not accentuating stakeholders' accountability. Many teachers were also disappointed at the lack of empowerment to make suggestions, especially in those areas that mandated their participation. Bayle, a teacher in one of the high schools, recounted how low teacher morale almost led to losing 10 good teachers in the high school, all in the same year. Bayle added this comment as a closing remark to yet another story about how superiors in the school system for the same school ordered Bayle to change a teaching approach. Recounting the impact that low teacher morale had on the teachers, Bayle offered this,

I think teacher's input is very critical. If you don't have a professional expertise in that area, you will not be successful [not asking for input]. You will make teachers feel belittled, demeaned, and I have seen it right here. We have had four principals since I have been here. We have a very good one now, very supportive and it's turned the school around. I think last year there were 10 teachers ready to leave. Ten good teachers; they were fed up with the way we were being treated. It was like, teachers go to the hall way, get your kids, you know, just bossing us around even when we were already there [at the hallway] as if we didn't know our job.

Based on Bayle's statement, it seemed the former school principal held similar assumptions as those described by McGregor (cited in Owens, 2001) in what he labeled as Theory X. According

to McGregor, principals who viewed their staff from a Theory X perspective held these assumptions, “The average person inherently dislikes work and will avoid it whenever possible. Because people dislike work, they must be supervised closely, directed, coerced, or threatened with punishment in order for them to put adequate effort” (p.67). Consequently, causing teachers to feel belittled would be far from communicating high expectations for teachers or providing them support. It would also be far from building a positive school culture.

Terry, on the other hand, expressed disappointment that teachers were denied even the ability to negotiate the type of professional development that would benefit them most. Terry, who taught economics, narrated how members of that department were denied sponsorship to a professional development opportunity they believed had the potential of revolutionizing the way they taught. The reason for the denial, as was explained, was that the idea of visiting a historical site, the place teachers wanted to visit, failed to meet the school’s specification for professional development. Terry put it this way,

I think that’s awfully sad. I think we ought to free teachers up to say, you know I have an opportunity next October to go to the Richmond Federal Reserve Bank and meet with chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bennett Bernanke, who will be there, and Jeffrey Lacker. Now that may mean nothing to any of my colleagues, but for me personally, I would get more from that conference than I will anything else that I could be doing for staff development. So I think things like that should be able to be negotiated, and I feel like that’s an area where we ought to free teachers up to say, here is where I think I am going to benefit and hold them accountable. Well, yeah I am going to go to that conference anyway, but it would be above and beyond my professional development I am expected to do as a teacher here. And I think that’s a shame.

Following this comment, Terry was asked, “So do you think teachers’ input is not given consideration? Terry responded,

I think particularly in a school our size, that’s very difficult to do because administratively, the whole idea of staff is as a school. We have this goal, this one goal and we are going to work on it. We are going to work on students’ writing, for example.

And all the teachers rock the writing workshop and think, okay, I get something out of this, but it's definitely not going to impact me as much as going to hear Chairman Ben Bennett Bernanke speak about monetary policies and hear from the man first hand. To me, I think teachers are not empowered, I feel there is a little bit of a- yes, we want to be professional, but yet in that regard we are treated like, like- You wonder why we are not allowed to negotiate, we are not allowed to negotiate because some people are maybe taking advantage of it. ... And I think teachers should certainly be given freedom to determine what's going to benefit them the most. And maybe they [administrators] want to stretch it a little bit, maybe they want to say, we need to work on students' writing. Fine, but give [teachers] freedom to suggest how.

The relationship between school size and the degree to which an administrator could effectively implement important cultural elements successfully has already been discussed. Terry acknowledged that the size of Maple High School made it difficult to implement important practices effectively. Like Terry, Pat, a teacher at Oak High School, was disappointed about the type of professional developments offered at the school. Pat said,

Our professional development overall at this particular school has been very disappointing. It really isn't anything that has benefited us ... as teachers. There have been a few things [based on] state mandate, such as someone coming in [from state] to help us meet our physical activity requirement. That was really beneficial. We have had in the past CPR, the First Aid training, [which] was also beneficial. But other than that, it's been very disappointing; we really haven't taken anything that was beneficial to us.

When Pat was asked what type of professional development would be beneficial to all or what kind would not be disappointing to the teachers, Pat said:

One of them would be kind of looking at the expectations across the curriculum, especially writing across the curriculum, so [that] we can be aware what other disciplines are doing. And also I guess [a] professional development that expresses teamwork for faculty because we have pretty low teacher morale here. ... things that are more arbitrary [such as] what people are doing [or] ... what you did wrong, [or] what you didn't do verses what you are doing type of environment, a lot of fear.

In fact, Pat was not alone in raising complaints about the type of professional development schools were offering. However, based on what Pat was saying about a lack of teamwork, low teacher morale, and the perception that leaders only focus on the negative side instead of the hard

effort teachers put into their work, all seemed to indicate a weak working relationship or some form of burnout. Stress related burnouts are also very common in schools, especially when teachers believe their hard work is not being acknowledged. Pat also seemed to indicate a committee relationship that was politicized, possibly with some lobbying practices to determine whose ideas were taken and whose were rejected. Pat acknowledged these in reference to the degree teachers were involved in decision making. Pat said,

We have a say but a kind of loaded say [heavily influenced by other opinions] because committees are [involved in] everything. Committees [often] include parents, administration, [and] students. I understand that they need to get our corporate views and actual consensus together, but a lot of times ... We may decide as a high school faculty blank, but by the time it goes up the chain, that's not what happens. So I think that the formation of committees is a good thing ... but we can't just make a decision as a staff. We have to have a committee, and we have to investigate, and we have to do this, and we have to do that, and I mean changes that are extremely slow and - it can be a little frustrating. So it's fairly effective. Does that make sense or is it a long way in the ditch?

The frustrations that Pat was expressing were that even though teachers were allowed some input, most of the time their suggestions did not yield much benefit because of the diverse interests from a diverse committee group. This made it hard to reach a consensus. Therefore, the process became slow and tedious, amounting to yet more frustrations for teachers who were already worn out by their day's job. Dylan expressed similar opinion while responding to a question about how new teachers are supported. Dylan complained,

It is not financially supported, I can assure you that. It's really not benefit driven; it's intrinsically [motivated]. It's not anything the system does; it's what I want to do. So there is no – you know, it's not like a ball strap that does great things for you, makes you stick to your job. You know all of us are replaceable. So there is no, "I am going to treat you great because we cannot afford for you to leave, type of mentality. And that is discouraging. Everybody is replaceable.

When Dylan was quizzed further about whether that implied new teachers received no support or if they were left to struggle on their own to find their niche, Dylan replied, "Yes. They get

mentor teachers, but what I got from you is what they get after that first year, and my answer is, that's personal. You know, nobody is patting your back making you feel great about your social studies". Consequently, the researcher probed about what other ways teachers were made to feel supported. Dylan insisted,

I don't know, I mean I think to get simplistic, it is financially driven. You know this job is overly strenuous at this school, no matter how discipline problems may be in other schools – it's financially driven. You know some people may say, I am speaking for myself, I can't speak for everybody else. You know because the pay is so little quit asking teachers to do so much for so little. You are asking me to do more, but what are you doing for me and my family? Which again boils to time and money?

As was mentioned above, one way that administrators could improve relationships with faculty would be by letting them become actively involved in decision making, especially in those areas that impacted their time. Involving the faculty in decision making, for example to determine alternative ways for solving certain problems, helps transfer the responsibility for completing any task involved to them. At the same time, allowing teachers like Dylan to express their frustrations and to look for solutions helped to reduce their frustrations. Unfortunately, even though teachers' input was actively sought at Oak High School, the way the committees were structured and the fact that a consensus had to be reached from such a diverse group made it hard for teachers' contributions to become truly beneficial. Consequently, the idea of a very diverse committee group did not genuinely satisfy teachers' need for input. Instead, the idea of a diverse committee stifled many valuable suggestions before they could be heard by others. Pat was right about need for a professional development that would enhance teamwork. But there was also a need to open up suggestions from all high school faculty members within and across departments. An alternative recommendation has been included in Chapter 5.

The idea of including parents in the committee at Oak High School could be interpreted as a way of seeking to diversify members' viewpoints. Unfortunately, seeking consensus from a very diverse group held the potential of intensifying politics. There were times when politically motivated parents tried to sway the decisions of school leaders so that teachers received mixed messages. It is therefore critical that school leaders consistently send messages that reflect the appropriate values they hoped to convey. For example, ordering Bayle to change a teaching approach in order to accommodate some complaining students conveyed a mixed message. According to Bayle, the best alternative would have been to ask the students and their parents to step up to the challenge. It is possible the school system did not intend to water down the standards set by Bayle in the class; however, the lack of clear communication with Bayle coupled with the coercion that followed to mandate the change of teaching approach translated to mixed messages. From Bayle's point of view, the process implied watering down those standards already set and accepted by most students in the class simply for the purpose of pleasing a few parents. The school system could have tried to accommodate students' needs by incorporating some after-school tutoring, but instead, the system chose to coerce Bayle. Here is what Bayle said,

As I was going to college, I was graded by my supervisor based on if I spoke a word of English while they were observing. My grade went down every time I spoke English. When I began working at this county, this was the first time I have had a problem with immersion, that technique of teaching where the teacher speaks only the foreign language. I have taught in three systems; this is the fourth and this is the first time I have had this problem. The issue was basically my lower students, apathetic students, were whining and complaining to the greatly intent ears of my superiors here; and no matter what I said, it wouldn't change their mind. I was ordered basically to speak English. But the issue was not that I was leaving *them* [my students] behind, because I never left questions in my students' mind. I made my students translate. I was speaking only the foreign language; they were translating everything, and if they got stuck, I would put something on board or write it. I got around there not speaking English. So I was not just



blowing away my students and leaving them clueless. I made them think harder. And this is what I told my superiors, you are watering down my classroom standards because if I start speaking English, I will not stop. ...So this to me is a very, very touchy subject. ... They had no experience with foreign language. I gave them a list of names of people who taught the way I taught. They made no effort to contact them at all.

Bayle concluded by saying,

I think teacher input is very critical. If you don't have a professional expertise in that area, you will not be successful [not asking for input]. You will make the teachers feel belittled, demeaned, and I have seen it right here.

There is a body of research that seemed to focus on the techniques of immersion.

However, this study will not delve into that. Unfortunately, politics in schools was not always stemming from parents. Sometimes the society caused the government to intervene in situations that caused endless politics in schools and that make little sense to educators. Sometimes too selfish politicians pitched parents against educators for the purpose of gaining votes.

During the interview, some participants decided to pick one subject and to talk about it at length. Some chose to talk about parents and the disciplinary problems, others spoke about professional development, while others spoke about government policies in schools. Kasey was one of those teachers who decided to respond to interview questions by referring to government policies at the schools. According to Kasey, many of the school policies mandated under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) made no sense to many educators. Here, Kasey emphasized the need for the government and policy makers to develop a better understanding of the problems currently facing schools before instituting policies that became hard to achieve. The lack of understanding about some of the problems today's students face and the impact this had on the schools was causing policy makers to institute policies that often failed to bridge between schools and the different stakeholders. This sometimes resulted to teachers feeling frustrated and

to quit their jobs while others who are very qualified opt not to join the profession.

Consequently, these factors seem to point to the advantage of using site-based decision making to bridge between policy makers and the schools. This is what Kasey said,

It is a sad [thing] that students do not come to class ready to sit down, ready to respect the teacher. Teachers have today to earn and demand respect. ... The government and state government have implemented at different times policies in the school programs [intended] to help students. ... [But] because students are unique [and] teachers are unique, a one size fits all does not generally work. In my experience none of these have [been] totally successful. They have reached a few children, but even much fewer in my opinion than a half. ... The No Child Left Behind is one example that I will use. I have not spoken with one teacher, nor have I heard of one teacher that endorses No Child Left Behind. The one segment of the No Child Left Behind that I do like is the idea that every school system should employ qualified teachers for the students. Every student deserves a teacher who knows the subject that he or she is teaching.

However, Kasey acknowledged that,

[The] problems we have run into are [that] poor schools or schools in rural areas or schools that have high problem with discipline, cannot always hire someone with the qualifications because no one applies. I actually know of a circumstance where [a school system] begged for teachers to come in [to teach] two different subjects and they simply could not get a certified teacher to teach. And it was not that the school system didn't try, but [for one], they didn't have the funds that other schools systems had available to [attract] teachers, and [two] the location was not one that a young single teacher would have been interested in moving to.

Kasey went on to elaborate,

What I do not like about the NCLB is that they [policy makers] assume that all students are ready to learn and [that] all students go home and study at night. [They assume students] do not have jobs, and if they have jobs, they [assume they] miraculously have plenty of time to study at home when they come home. When the reality is that kids get home at 10 o'clock at night, some will close at 1 o'clock at night, [and] they come to school exhausted. The game of the school is [accommodating] students working outside the school.

Kasey also emphasized that the policy makers, especially those involved in the NCLB, failed to put into consideration the diverse population of the public schools. Literature actually supports what Kasey was saying that private schools were not subject to the many pressures that public

schools were made to face (Rowan, as cited in Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Unlike the private schools, public schools leaders were not empowered to make some decisions and their schools were plagued with many bureaucracies that made running them very inefficient. Therefore, comparing their performance with that of the private or charter schools was unfair. In regard to the diverse population of the public schools, Kasey said,

The other thing about NCLB is that in thinking that all students are equal. They do not take into account that some students are highly motivated, this is genetic, or they have parents to encourage them and make education seem interesting. They do not take into account that students have learning problems; they have physical problems and problems at home; and some come from a divorced family. I can give you an example of a student who was an A student in my class and the parents divorced. The next year the student was an F student. Was it my teaching, no; was it any other person teaching, no; it was the home environment. ... We cannot provide or design a program with a one size fits all.

When Kasey was asked what ways the government could ensure that it implemented policies that could support the education of all children, Kasey replied,

[The] government agencies inquire or seek advice before making these [policies]. But who they sometimes get [the suggestions] is the problem because they sometimes ask people who have not been in the classroom perhaps in 20 years. Or they ask people who are in the Central Office. They see education in [terms of] numbers rather than, what the kid needs; what the kids are doing, and what's happening in the kids live. I also know they ask a lot of teachers who are in accelerated classes and those teachers absolutely cannot empathize with teachers or students who have difficulties. I speak [out of knowledge] because I know of one person who has been used on ACT; for example, and he has been called for other recommendations. [This person] has an IQ of over 160 and he cannot reach kids who are struggling, cannot understand. He has a good heart and is a good teacher for accelerated students, [but he cannot relate to low performing students]. This is where who you choose to [give] advice [matters].

Again, this point by Kasey supported the need for allowing site-based decision making where more teachers' input would be involved. Another teacher who emphasized the lack of congruency between the NCLB policies and the schools' needs was Carroll. Carroll said,

The one best thing for the students that I have been able to find is just a constant committed attitude for both the administrators and the teachers. And at this point we are

stretched further and further each year to be able to answer to the powers that be and still make a difference to the kids. ... This is where, for example, we have been given the mandates by the No Child Left Behind has given those but the funding is not been put through and sometimes those mandates are not realistic. ... We are not given the tools to meet the goals.

In summary, helping make coherence by providing a general understanding of what was going on in the schools, providing the rationale behind the different school practices or showing their relationship with the school vision, and showing consistency of the school values all helped strengthen working relationships. Therefore, reiterating the school vision, emphasizing the importance of striving for its ideals, encouraging teachers' input into decision making, and providing tutorial services for students all helped improve coherence. Unfortunately, many schools were not seeking to show coherence.

#### *Building a Strong Learning Community*

Senge (1990), Fullan (2001), and Deming (2000) are the best known advocates of learning organizations. Although the term 'learning community' was only mentioned by one participant and in reference to the vision the individual held for one school, it was seen as the most descriptive term conceptualizing the growing need for a learning community. The learning community was conceptualized as encompassing effective teachers' developmental programs, collegiality among teachers with support for new teachers, and promotion of a positive partnership with parents in the education of their children.

Along these goals of a learning community, this study indicated a need to establish a knowledge base centered in areas that made the most impact on student learning. Therefore, in order for secondary schools to become effective in supporting student performance, in reducing student drop-out rate, and improving college-going rates, a strong community of learners needed

to be established in three important areas. The three important areas were: (1) knowledge supporting growth for the faculty, (2) knowledge supporting growth and orientation of new teachers, and (3) knowledge supporting positive partnership with parents in the education of their children. The study indicated that increasing knowledge of faculty also encompassed three areas, (a) promoting collaboration within departments that produce teachers' growth within subject areas. This was also referred to as the intracurricular support and was found to be most beneficial for new teachers. (b) By promoting collaboration across departments which was also referred to as intercurricular support. This was found to be very beneficial to students (c) By improving professional development programs some of which were already in place. Professional development programs also needed to emphasize two separate areas (i) the whole-staff development programs and (ii) individual teacher's growth plan or the personal growth plan. Therefore, this section on building strong learning community included: (i) promoting intracurricular support that included support for new teachers, (ii) promoting intercurricular support, and (iii) improving professional development programs that included individual teacher's growth plans.

#### *Promoting Intracurricular Support and Support for New Teachers*

Most teachers and principals explained that collaboration within departments was higher than it was across departments. Almost all those interviewed expressed high approval for intra-departmental collaboration. Although many school principals expressed approval of it, none of the leaders had instituted any form of structure to enhance school-wide intracurricular activities. In fact, even in those schools where departmental collaboration was reported to be high, the initiative seemed to stem from departmental heads, not from the school leaders. It is possible

some administrators encouraged intracurricular collaboration because in some schools teachers within some departments were assigned the same lunch period or the same planning time.

The math departments of participating schools were reported to be very collegial. Even those teachers who were not in the math departments reported knowing that teachers in their math departments were working in close collaboration. Many English departments were also practicing collaboration, and, in one school, it was the social studies department that was very collegial. In fact, teachers in these departments were reported to be so closely knit in their relationships and support for each other that support for new teachers was more effective here than anywhere else. Actually, the stronger the bond among departmental teachers, the more effective the support they rendered to new teachers in the departments. As a result, the subtitle for this heading was extended to include support for new teachers.

Although most schools had the mentor-mentee programs intended to support new teachers, many of the teachers who were interviewed indicated that these programs were not effective. At least 89% of the teachers indicated they were not effective. Many teachers reported that mentors were too busy to meet with their mentee in order to provide support and counsel when it was needed. In fact, those mentors who were interviewed admitted being too busy with their own schedules so that meeting with their mentee was always pushed aside or pushed to after-school. Unfortunately, the after-school meetings were when everyone was tired and when some people were getting ready to begin another school duty. Many teachers indicated that if the mentor-mentee programs were to be successful, mentors needed more free time to visit with their mentees while the mentees were still teaching or immediately after a mentee had gone through some class crises in order to provide some needed counsel and support.

As mentioned, this study found that highly collegial departments held a greater potential for supporting the needs of new teachers than any mentor-mentee program. It was also easier for new teachers to develop natural mentors here than anywhere else. In these departments, everyone was a teacher and a learner.

The term ‘learning community’ was used by Kerry in reference to the vision Kerry held for Maple High School. Kerry envisioned a learning community as one that would involve all stakeholders, that would lead to a safe, teaming, and thriving environment, and that helped students develop to their maximum potential in their talents and abilities. This is how Kerry envisioned the learning community.

I would want the Maple High School to be a learning community that is characterized by first safety, mutual respect among all in the community- all stakeholders, and a common purpose; that being a teaming, thriving, learning environment where students can develop to their maximum, and where they are able to develop all kinds of talents and abilities.

When Kris, the head teacher of the math department at the Maple High School, was asked how much departmental collaboration was practiced at the school, Kris chose to speak only about the math department,

I think the math department is very collegial. It hasn’t always been this way, but I really appreciate [the] good math department we have here. You know there was a time when we were basically two departments, but we are very collegial now. ... Teachers in the math department share material; they share tests, and [they] give each other all kinds of support. So a beginning teacher can get help writing a test and [any] other help that [he or she] may need. This is a part of our informal structure [and] it really happens here. But it doesn’t happen in other departments and it’s not something the administration has been involved with or even knows it happens, I think. Part of the problem is that principals don’t last very long in this school. You know, since I have been here, there has been eight principals.

Kris acknowledged that new teachers received more support when a department was collegial than they did from the mentor-mentees programs. Kris also noted that the idea of changing

principals too often was not conducive to the type of supportive school culture that the teachers were looking for. Jody, another teacher in the same department, agreed with the statement from Kris that the math department was very collegial. Jody said,

It helps that we have a common lunchtime together for 22 minutes, because we get to talk about [many] things. ... We give departmental exams, everybody is supposed to give the same departmental exam and we are pretty good about doing that and checking item analysis. We look at the students' progress, whether or not 83% of the students in Algebra II missed this [particular] question and why. Was it [because of the way it was] worded; could it be worded better to make it more [clear for the students]? We're very good about looking at that kind of information and sharing [it] with each other. So, as a department I think we do a great job on that. But I can't speak for other departments because I'm not in [those] departments; but our math department does very well.

Jody went on to say,

I think the math department does very well, particularly with new teachers that come in. We try to give them our pacing guide, and try to help them out in any way possible with suggestions and [with] technology. We got a couple here though that knows more technology [than we do]. [They] have more technological knowledge than we do, so they are actually helping us quite a bit. I would think our math department does very well. We try to stay on task and make sure everybody ends at the same place and everybody's testing the same kind of things.

One of those technically savvy teachers that Jody was referring to was Logan. Logan was relatively new at the Maple High School but had 21 years of teaching experience in other schools. Intracurricular collaboration at the math department was allowing teachers like Logan to share their technical expertise with others in the department. This way, departmental teachers continued to benefit and grow from each other's strengths. Before joining the Maple High School, Logan had learned to work in collaboration with others to integrate various teaching technologies. This was how Logan explained that process,

When I was at my last school, another teacher and I decided to use on-line grade book. We [planned] about how we will use our website [to communicate to parents]. When we started using [the on-line grade book], we started [hearing that] people were calling the administration to ask, "Why can't I look up my kid's grade from his or her teacher's



website the way [other] students are doing? [At the time, the school] had started a freshman Academy, [actually it had started] two years back. When [it first] started ... I had gone to the principal and said, "I think [the idea of on-line grade book] would be a big help to the freshman Academy [because] it will help increase communication. [I explained that] we were trying to gain support [for it] and could have all the teachers in the freshman Academy get [on-line grade book] with the web page. We could post our lesson plans, and we could do other things." And so she had me set it up to train teachers how to use it. There were 10 teachers in the freshman Academy and we were all [able to] use it. We [received] so much positive response from the principal, from the director of the school and the school board members. ... [But there was] also [some] negative [comments] based on the fact that the parents of the freshman students could check the grades of their students online, but the parents of the juniors and seniors could not. So halfway through the year, I trained the rest of the teachers in the school [how to use it].

Logan also spoke highly about the support the math department was providing to new teachers in the department. Logan said,

In this school, and I don't know if it has to do with the structure of the school or not, but that's one of the things I have really enjoyed about coming to this school. [It's] that all of the math teachers work together. And we don't just sit there and socialize; we do talk things. It is a *chance to talk* [opportunity to discuss things], and we do. We get to know each other very well, and we are very receptive of new teachers coming in. We talk about having problems with this; we give each other suggestions; we talk about this and we talk about that. And I think that's pretty much here. But I have no idea if that's built into the structure; I guess in a sense it is in that we all have the same lunch period. ... But the reality is most schools and in this one to some extent, you don't get much interaction with other teachers.

Logan also explained that there were teachers who probably got into the teaching profession without intending to stay. However, on the flip side of that, there were also teachers who did not intend to stay but eventually ended up liking the teaching profession and became wonderful teachers. So, schools cannot ignore the needs of new teachers with the assumption that they may not want to stay. Logan described those circumstances this way,

I think they are some people [who did not intend to stay in the teaching profession]. I had some friends from college who said I want to give back; I want to serve. But I am not going to do it throughout the rest of my life. I want to teach for a few years but then when I start settling down and getting family, I want to find something where I can make more money. And I had several friends who knew [even as they come in] that they were not

going to stay as teachers. But I [also] think that they are many that come [in] thinking they [will] stay, and very quickly get out due to a couple of things. One being that - you know this isn't just a job for everybody. There are people that need to get out, but I don't think [it is the case] for most of them. I think most get out because they are so overwhelmed and they don't get the support they think they need.

In regard to collaboration, Kerry, the new principal at the Maple High School, indicated that the school climate coupled with effective communication and support for teachers were the most important aspects for implementing cultural factors. This is what Kerry said,

I think collaboration is extremely important but it's a symptom. If the other elements are as they should be, then collaboration will grow. Of course it also is a factor of the hiring process, and I had very little opportunity to influence I should say, you know to look for that. But in a school our size, departments of course are the units that you begin with and within those departments, I as the principal can set the expectations what I want that department to do in terms of collaboration. But there again at the end of the day it comes down to that climate, that tone, that atmosphere in which people feel supported and supportive to work one-on-one with each other and to help each other and to share. I mean not only share materials, but share frustrations, hopes, ideas, [and] motivation.

However, Kerry also asserted that regardless of the size of school, effective communication was what mattered. This is what Kerry said,

My limit to the experience here at this school, having been here just since June, I think probably the first thing that comes into mind is the sheer size of the school. There are times when I really feel like I need to be four or five people. It is a 24 seven job. But beyond that, I think regardless of the size of school, it's comes down to communication. The more effectively we communicate – and the administrator role is not only to be the communicator, but to establish an environment in which other people can communicate. So if we are not creating and inviting people to use avenues for their own communication then we are missing both.

Consequently, Kerry supported site-based decision making as a means for creating those types of environments where people communicated and analyzed problems together. Kerry said, "I am still a proponent of site-based decision making".

Shannon was the head teacher in the math department at Dogwood High School. When Shannon was asked about collaboration in the school, Shannon also decided to speak about the

math department and insisted that was the only way it ought to be done; everybody ought to gain from each other and build on other peoples' strengths. Shannon explained that the support and encouragement teachers in the math department gave each other caused them to become more dedicated to their work. Teachers in the department chose to do more and to work longer hours than other departments. Shannon said,

I don't know any other way. I realize we have teachers, who very reluctantly share their ideas with others, but in my situation and in our department, I think that's unique. I don't think it's very rare, but we have a department where we have an enormous amount of collaboration. We share materials, ideas; we work together. Our department has about three new teachers and they benefit from this. ... We have 30 minutes [for lunch], and we spend that time talking about the things we need to do. Another thing that I think is very rare, [is that] in our department, you know our teaching time ends at 2:45, but for most teachers in my department, we don't leave until about 4:30.

Bobbie, a teacher in the same math department, confirmed what Shannon was saying about the collegial support in the math department at Dogwood High School. Bobbie explained how this teacher collaboration had been very beneficial not only to the veteran teachers but also to new teachers as well. This is what Bobbie said,

I think it is a necessity [teachers working in collaboration]. In our department, we really try to work together. For example, those teachers who, say teach Algebra I ... we stay on task, plan how far we will get this week or next week. We try to keep things moving at a pace the students can work with, and we try to support one another whether it's making the test, or making a worksheet, or coming up with the PowerPoint that we need to present some concepts to students. And I'd say it has been very helpful to me and also to the new teachers because they can incorporate that. They don't have to sit down and develop it [teaching material] by themselves. So we work together and we sometimes reinvent. You know sometimes we find that *what we've been doing* doesn't work and- [we try it in another way]. We also have lots of meetings with our new teachers and we collaborate a lot. It also helps that we have the same planning time.

Tracy, the head teacher in the English department at Dogwood High School, indicated that although the school had a mentor-mentee program, the English department had taken upon itself to support new teachers within the department by letting everyone pitch in as much as possible.

Tracy observed that the sharing of ideas, materials, and emotional support in the English department was very advantageous to new teachers. This is what Tracy said,

There are only five or six of us here [in the school] that are actually mentors. There is a whole list of things that you need to do with *them* [new teachers]. I find that, especially in English department I don't know about the others, but a lot of times at lunch time is when *they* [new teachers] will come in. [When they come in] we all put support for them because they will have questions and just want to get them out; get them off [their chest]. You know we listen to them. We've had them cry, even the guys. They cry.

Tracy went on to point that for new teachers support at the departmental level was probably the most critical. Those who received advice at the departmental level had a greater chance of staying than those who relied on mentors outside the department. Some schools assigned mentors based on who was trained as a mentor and was available. Tracy said,

I think grade levels have a tendency to share with each other. We've always shared. This year we have three new teachers plus two or three others who have not been here for long, may be 1 to 3 years. We suggest things and are willing to share with them things. We talk tell them what worked well for us, sometimes they incorporate it, sometimes they don't. If they do they will say it was very helpful. If they don't, sometimes those are the ones that don't stay, but we do our best [to support them].

Tracy also added,

I think that there is this unrealistic expectation on the part of so many new teachers that they think they are going to be so cool, so liked [by the kids] or they think that the kids are automatically going to respect them and listen to them. It just doesn't work that way. I think classroom management is huge and I think that the principal and the administration really need to support new teachers when they have problems of classroom management. Classroom management is the reason I think, most people quit especially after that first year. I tell [new teachers in my department] that it will get better.

Again, Tracy said that offering emotional support and encouragement at the departmental level had a greater impact on the new teachers because that's where they worked. Besides, at the departmental level, it was easier to develop natural mentors; someone who was willing to listen, someone who could model especially when the department was highly collegial. Tracy also

noted that classroom management played a major role in determining whether or not a new teacher will stay. However, even as Kasey emphasized in those earlier comments, students' lack of respect for teachers coupled with their negative attitude about school was probably what caused new teachers to feel overwhelmed.

Robbie, a teacher at the Maple High School, recounted how the first years of teaching were the most difficult part of the teaching career both emotionally and mentally. Unfortunately, without departmental support, Robbie struggled alone. In fact, Robbie admitted that the lack of alternatives was what supported perseverance. This is what Robbie said,

The first year of teaching was by far the worst year of your life. It was not the worst year in my life, it was terrible. I was a terrible teacher, I had terrible students, and I was not well prepared to be in classroom [in that environment]. You know little by little over the years I kind of found my place and got it all figured out. But if I didn't have to help in earning an income; or if I had a lot of money; if I had other option; I probably would have left by the first five years. It was very, very hard, emotionally, mentally and physically. So if schools really want to hang on their teachers they are going to have to work on improving their mentoring programs for new teachers

Carmen heads the social studies department at Walnut High School and also sponsors a program called, 'We the People Program'. Carmen, who maintains Walnut High School had the best school setting, has also been instrumental in fostering collaborative activities, not just at the Walnut High School, but also across other high schools in the county. In fact, Carmen's influence and support for collaborative activities were having an impact even to the Middle school of Walnuts High School's county. This is what Carmen said first in response to ideal school climate and then in response to collaboration in schools,

[An ideal school climate is] one where everybody shares their ideas and [they are] really open in what each is doing and is willing to share with everybody else. [From there] we strike on what the kids need to know and why they need to know it. Now, really I may be over optimistic, but I think Walnut High School has the best school setting I have been and that's why I don't leave.

Carmen also went on to say,

Now with our social program of which I am chair, we collaborate a lot. Every time we find something good that correlates to the standards [or that] works well for the kids; we share with each other. As a matter of fact we share with everybody who teaches high school history in our county. In fact yesterday, I just got back from a meeting in which I presented to the sixth grade throughout the entire county to implement [collaboration] across grade level. So now they are beginning to do the same thing we've been doing for six years. ... So we are trying to get everyone to work together. You know, lots of mind connects for good ideas.

Carmen's philosophy, "Lots of mind connects for great ideas," is the key to successful collaboration among teachers and the main reason why schools should support it. It is also a good argument for site-based decision making. Although Chuck, the assistant principal who spoke on behalf of the principal at the Walnut High School, explained that the school had been trying to accommodate what the teachers want, collaboration becomes more effective when it is fostered by the school leaders. Chuck said,

Well we try to accommodate [teachers' requests]. Just like now we are trying to make the schedule out. What I try to do is get the department heads [putting] teachers together so that they can put forth what they would like to see. Teachers are free to do what they want, putting in balance what we [the administrators] can and can't do. But we make as much effort to support collaboration and communication as much as we can.

Cade, on the other hand, admitted to the problem of teachers being too busy to provide enough support for new teachers at the Oak High School. Although Cade added that the school encouraged everyone to pitch in, especially when the actual mentors were very busy, there were hardly any free time for other teachers except during the lunch period or during the teachers' planning time. In many schools, this was when teachers were trying to catch up with some grading. Cade said this in regard to the mentor-mentee program support,

Our teachers are assigned a mentor, which is another teacher that has been here for a while. That is beneficial. But again it depends on the mentor. We are very busy, which

unfortunately is one of the drawbacks for having a lot of input in what goes on in our school. That means you are also more involved in it. It would be better to eventually let mentees pick their own mentors naturally.

Cade acknowledgement that “it would be better for mentees to pick their own mentors naturally” supports the idea that collegial departments were the best options for handling the needs of new teachers. However, Pat saw the problem of the mentor-mentee programs in terms of the school size, Pat said,

I think that because we are a small school, that helps the effectiveness [of the mentor-mentees program]. But I think if we had a chance to place that program in a larger school, I think it would completely be ineffective because there is not that much interaction [between teachers especially in other departments]

In regard to collaboration, Frankie, the new principal at Magnolia High School who had only been there 1 year, spoke about working to rebuild the school culture. Frankie said,

Right now I would say that we are in the parts base, and I do think within the parts, we are trying to take steps to give them [teachers] more opportunities to work together. I try to given them common planning time. [Right now] we are doing curriculum planning. We are going to try some integration strategies so that we can do something across the curriculum as opposed to working on individual modules. So I think from the parts and points or just the course work areas, I think we are doing a pretty good job, but as far as putting the working of all these together, I think we probably are lacking there. I think we will try to focus on that within the next two or three years to try to come up with strategies.

In summary, intracurricular support or collaboration within departments helped teachers gain from each other’s strength. Teachers were able to support each other emotionally and intellectually; they shared ideas about classroom management and use of classroom technology; and they sometimes reinvented new and better teaching strategies. Collaboration within the departments also helped support new teachers better than did mentor-mentees programs.

### *Promoting Intercurricular Support*

Many principals and teachers highly approved intercurricular collaborations; about a 97% of those who were interviewed expressed their approval for intercurricula collaborations. Unfortunately, only three participants gave some indication about instances where and when it was being practiced in their schools. Also, only one teacher indicated intercurricular collaboration would not be appropriate. According to this teacher, collaboration would take away time from teaching content knowledge. It may be important to add that that support for intercurricula collaborations did not imply integrating every lesson. Actually, integration served best for those topics that became most beneficial for students to learn as integrated topics or for those concepts that became difficult for students to grasp so that a repeat of them in different ways became beneficial to students. This, therefore, did not remove the teacher from teaching content. Content concepts could still be taught in conjunction with the intercurricula projects aimed at emphasizing those concepts. Research indicates that integration of subjects helped to make learning more meaningful and applicable for students. Making learning relevant also increased students' motivation to learn. In addition, integration helped to support students' ownership of their learning.

Unfortunately, very few teachers tried to integrate subjects. In spite of this, some teachers and principals had already started seeing the benefits of intercurricula activities. For example, Shawn, the principal at the Cherry High School, explained how the math department and the computer auto design (CAD) teachers were working in collaboration to support students' learning. This is what Shawn said,

I feel that cross teaching different subject is very, very beneficial to students. ... We have a knowledge CAD (Computer auto design) class here that designs building and



machines with computer graphic programs. And it is absolutely unreal the amount of math that you have to know to be involved in the auto CAD program. [Now] the teacher in the auto CAD and the math teacher work very closely to support each other's program; that is collaborative effort which I feel is very, very beneficial [to students].

Desiree, who had assumed there was no intercurricula collaboration going on at Cherry High School, emphasized that in the real world many jobs require employees who have the ability to integrate previous knowledge with new skills. Therefore, Desiree insisted students ought to be prepared for such job environment and emphasized intercurricula collaboration held the potential to prepare students for such relevant skills by means of integrating concepts. This is what Desiree said,

In this school intracurricular, we share a lot of ideas. But as we say cross curricular, there is, I want to say zero. Okay? There is no collaboration whatsoever, and that was one of the points I [was trying to emphasize] that being the administrator I would like to see more of that [being] done because again when the students see the very world working device, for example, [how] math [can be applied] in computers classes or in carpentry, then I think you are looking at those students who really do not like math to find out, "Aha, I am actually going to use [math] if I decide to become a carpenter." We have a lot of plumbing here. Definitely you are going to use a lot of math in plumbing. If you are going into architecture, then we also have projects with architectural design. That too [will be] dealing with math, and you see, you can instill in those children that this is a cross curricula base. And the teachers can get together and work out ... one unit or a couple of lessons. ... I think [that] would be beneficial [to students] and would enhance their [learning].

Jowie teaches with Desiree in an English department. Jowie indicated that the increase in emphasis on standardized tests was changing the way teachers were looking at intercurricular collaborations. Jowie said, "We are improving on that [intercurricular collaboration] especially [because of] the ACT. We are seeing a lot of vocabulary build up in other classes." Cade, who admitted that intercurricular collaboration, was not as high as intracurricular collaboration at Oak High School, seemed to indicate that interpersonal relationships among teachers sometimes hindered both the intracurricular and the intercurricular collaborations. This is what Cade said,

I think there is also collaboration across the departments, but I think you'd see it more naturally within the departments. I think that the things that prevent it are personal feelings. If a person doesn't like somebody, they are not going to be open to that person offering their ideas. So there is a little bit of that, which is unfortunate.

However, Alex provided more insights as to how teachers were becoming involved in intercurricula activities. Alex's comment followed a statement that teachers at the Oak High School were working together more than they had done in the past. Alex said,

Well actually tomorrow is one of those days called curriculum planning days. What teachers do at these planning days is they work on anything that has to do with the school improvement. [For example] the Math and Science departments are getting together ... anybody that teaches science. They will be meeting all day tomorrow so that they can integrate the [science and math] curriculum and make sure that our text books are meeting the standards. Also, [they are to] make sure that if something is taught in science but math also correlates to that subject at the same time.

Alex went on to say that the reason for all these was because the school was trying to become a science and math signature school. That was why the integration and correlation of these two subjects was becoming very important.

In many schools, however, there was really no evidence of intercurricular integration. Teachers who were interviewed insisted that there was no evidence of intercurricular integration at their schools. For example, Tracy, a department chair at Dogwood High School, emphatically said, "There is no curriculum integration. We talk about it but I don't think it happens, I am just being honest." Kris also said there was hardly room for interaction of curriculum at Maple High School because the departments were so far apart,

[There is] not much [inter-curriculum activities at the school]. This wing is Mathematics; Science is over there; History is that way, English is that way, so we are geographically separated. ... You know, unfortunately there are people in the English department that are way off, I don't even know who they are. I mean, I know their names, but I couldn't match the name with the person.

Kris also added that for interdepartmental collaboration to happen, the administrator would have to be involved, “There is no cross departmental or integration of curriculum. Curriculum integration would have to be administratively led”. Jody also insisted that there was no intercurricular collaboration,

No, no! There isn't! I would say there's none. None! Other than the time we meet with other teachers in other disciplines, and that is when we're meeting for a school improvement plan. We're all on a committee and so that's about the only other time that we would meet and talk about [intercurricular collaboration]. But there's no time set aside to [participate in intercurricular collaboration].

In summary, intercurricular activities are especially very helpful to students because they made learning relevant and interesting. Although teachers gain from working in collaboration with others across departments, integration of curriculum would especially be beneficial to students because it helps them to synthesize knowledge from different subjects and learn how this knowledge can be applied in different situations of their lives.

#### *Improving Professional Development Programs*

The study indicated that the learning community also encompassed all the various forms of professional development programs including those already in practice at the different counties and schools. Unfortunately, many of the teachers who were interviewed expressed great disappointment at the way professional developments programs were offered. In addition, there was a general miscommunication or a misconception about what professional development programs were intended to achieve.

According to the U.S Department of Education (2006), the purpose of professional development was to support continued instructional improvement, which implied continued support for teachers' growth. This being the case, most teachers were looking for professional

development that would enhance their skills, update them, and help them maintain life-long learning through research-based ideas and techniques. This study separated teachers' developmental programs into whole-staff developmental plan and the individual teacher's growth plan. Teachers' developmental expectations that were diverse and yet specific to each teacher's need were referred to individual teacher's growth plan. Similarly, developmental programs that were offered to groups but were specific to teachers' needs, such as specific to subject area or specific to need to improve in technology, were also considered as the individual teacher's growth plan because they served specific teachers' purpose. On the other hand, whole-staff developmental plans were those developmental plans that were directed towards the whole school according to the needs of each institution. Examples of these were the whole-staff writing workshops, the CPA and First Aid workshops, or the suicide prevention workshops.

As was noted, highly collaborative and collegial departments enabled teachers to reflect together, to share ideas about new teaching strategies, or to reinvent new ones based on teachers' experiences. These departments analyzed and solved problems together. Those who were expert in technology trained others and those who were experienced in classroom management helped others with those skills. Further, collegial departments were effective in supporting the establishment of new teachers and their growth. In fact, collegial departments held the potential for implementing supportive practices for both new and veteran teachers in many ways, including coteaching or coaching by expert teachers and peer observation. All these were factors that encouraged individual teacher's growth. Although intercurricula collaborations also helped teachers to grow, they mainly made learning relevant and applicable for students so they helped to support students' ownership of learning.

As indicated, there was general miscommunication or misconception about what professional development programs were intended to achieve. Different factors seemed to account for this at different schools. The first problem seemed to stem from the way professional development was structured. From the beginning, teachers' interests were not put into consideration. Consequently, while many teachers sought professional development programs for individual growth, schools were focusing on whole-staff developmental workshops. About 95% of all teachers interviewed indicated that professional development was important for updating their skills. However, almost every one of those teachers also asserted that their schools' developmental programs were not serving those goals.

The second problem seemed to stem from the fact that most school systems did not have enough funds to support sending teachers to conferences where individual teacher's growth plan could be enhanced. As a result, these school systems offered professional development locally in the form of whole-group workshops aimed at supporting whole-school goals. Therefore, very little support was given to individual teacher's growth needs. Accordingly, many teachers associated professional development workshops with state mandates and their attendance became simply a way of fulfilling those mandates. However, teachers did not hope to grow. In fact, according to many teachers, there were no benefits added to them.

Finally, many school systems also construed professional development as discrete pieces of learning intended to meet state requirement. Because of this, some school systems offered developmental programs based on contracts that were incorporated into the school budget at the beginning of the school year. This implied most recent school or teachers' needs could not be accommodated. Consequently, many teachers complained that their professional development

programs were simply a waste of time and money. Others complained that the workshops in their programs were too generic with no transfer of knowledge or that they were repetitious with meaningless activities. Nevertheless, there were schools that tried to make a distinction for their teachers. These schools offered both whole-staff developmental programs and the individual teacher's growth plan through sending their teachers to national conferences where individual teacher's growth plans in the subject area were met. However, even in these schools, teachers' conferences were picked based on subjects not based on teachers' input about individual teacher's need for personal growth.

Unfortunately, many schools were working hard to provide professional development they hoped would satisfy teachers. But as mentioned, without teachers' input, many of these development programs were genuinely turning out to be the way many teachers described them, a waste of time and money. This part was, therefore, aimed at illuminating the differences in perceptions between teachers and the providers of school development programs as a means for emphasizing areas that needed improvement. The study revealed that in order to achieve the goals of professional development, teachers' input would be crucial. In regard to broken communication, Robbie who was a teacher at the Maple High School wondered aloud,

I really don't think they get it; the in-service or the professional development. In my opinion the best professional development for the chemistry teacher in this school is for the four of us to spend time together, collaborating and cooperating on our subjects. I understand that there are other kinds of stuff that the state requires. We just did a suicide prevention thing, and sometimes they do a new thing like we did a new computer program for attendance this year; certain things they need to get us all together and work with us. But we rarely ever, have ever pointed professional development. [Something like], "okay you four chemistry teachers we are going to give you some professional development and in-service whatever, on how the four of you can collaborate and work together and make your chemistry department stronger and better." And I feel like every time we get together for in-service, somebody brings that up. ... In-service really is most helpful to the teacher when it can be applied to your work and what you are doing with

the students, [or] how you are cooperating with your colleagues who are doing the same thing with their students. And we have had almost none of that here. Another thing that we really haven't had much of here is on-going professional development. It's kind of we hit and miss. We do a little of this, and then the next year we do a little of that, then the next year we go back and do something else. We don't really have a consistent thing of professional development. I mean, for me it's too random.

Like Robbie, Kris asserted that the professional development programs at Maple High School were too random, too generic, and therefore lacking transfer of knowledge. Kris also argued that teachers were not getting enough in the professional development programs and explained these problems in this manner,

I think a big problem is that there are key staff development activities that come around year after year. ... You know, there is couple of years on this, and a couple of years on that, and a couple of years on this, and they are always too generic. ... This year it was regular and relevance, I forgot what it was last year. Anyway it didn't make any impression because it was a one year thing. I remember one year ... we had this lecturer ... he happened to be a social study person and every example of how you implement this idea had to do with the social class. And people came away saying, 'I understand how it works in social studies but it won't work in math, or it won't work in science, or it won't work in this because there was no transfer.' As a matter of fact the National Science Foundation says that it takes at least 50 hours of staff development to change teacher behavior, and we never get that. We never have that! We will have an idea like this year, then, we will probably have two hours of an afternoon, four or five times a year. So maybe [have a total of] 10 hours. We never get that! And it's one afternoon after school when everybody is tired, and nobody cares. And then a month or a month and half later, we do it again.

Based on these comments from Kris and Robbie, it is clear that the school was not seeking to make coherence. However, Jody perceptions about school developmental programs were even more perplexing. Jody perceived school developmental programs as a form of coercion.

Certainly, school systems never intended for professional development to be construed as a form of coercion, especially when they were paying so much money to bring in speakers they assumed would make an impact on teachers. But this is how Jody perceived the lack of teachers' input,

Well, they [administrators] kind of force us into having professional development as a school. Like yesterday we had an in service on teenage suicide prevention. The guy spoke for two solid hours which was a little boring. I guess for most of us in the math department we feel that if you teach by subject, that is, if it's not subject specific, then it will have little impact. The year before this, we spent a lot of money on reading programs and trying to help us help students learn how to read better. That's hard in a mathematics classroom to try to take time out of your normal mathematics lessons to try to help students learn how to read. I wasn't equipped to teach somebody how to read, and I'm not sure that a four-hour in service is going to help me help them read better. So again, I thought it was maybe wasted time, wasted money.

Again, not letting Jody participate in decision making as to 'what would be the best way to enhance students' reading', or what type of school improvement developmental programs would be beneficial to everyone, caused Jody to view the school initiative as a waste of time and money. It is possible if Jody's input had been sought, this perception would have been altered. However, going back to the point made by Terry about empowering teachers and holding them accountable, Terry maintained that teachers wanted to be perceived as professionals, treated like professionals, and held accountable like professionals. Therefore, they needed to be allowed to negotiate what type of professional development would be most beneficial to them,

... So I think things like that should be able to be negotiated, and I feel like that's an area where we ought to free teachers up to say, here is where I think I am going to benefit and hold them accountable.

Terry also said,

I think teachers are not empowered, I feel there is a little bit of a - yes we want to be professional, but yet in that regard we are treated like, like - You wonder why we are not allowed to negotiate. ... I think teachers should certainly be given freedom to determine what's going to benefit them the most. And maybe they [administrators] want to stretch it a little bit, maybe they want to say, we need to work on students' writing. Fine, but give them [teachers] freedom to suggest how.

Skyler, a math teacher at the Magnolia High School, acknowledged that the lack of communication between the secondary school teachers and the superiors who arranged their



professional development activities resulted in not meeting the needs for secondary school teachers. Skyler, said,

I think *it* [professional development] is very important as long as the teacher guides the development that's being done. To have a supervisor come up with professional development just to address the needs that we know; implies there is very little communication between the two. If we were given a block of money and told here is the money that you have for the math department for professional development, I think we could do a better job because the vast majority of our teachers are elementary and middle school. So when they get a program that suits their needs, there is nothing left to address ours.

Sadly, Tracy expressed a similar setback and frustrations that resulted from having to leave important school work in order to attend a professional development program, only to find that the professional development was geared towards the middle or elementary school. Tracy said,

We have a lot of professional development, some good, some not too good, [and] some that do not apply to me. What hurts me is when I am told I have to go to the Central Office, for example in April, late April when I have AP exam coming up first of May. And then it's really about elementary or middle school teachers. So that really upsets me; I don't feel I should have to [attend] the rest. On the other hand, [there are times when] they have brought some really good people. Some exceptional [people] have talked to us in the professional development. At the same time, there are people that I wish that they could get for us, and [which] I have asked for, but they haven't got them yet. I will tell you though that the technology classes [they give] are really outstanding. Katie (name changed) does an excellent job in teaching those, and they are tons of opportunities in those.

Although Tracy observed the school system did a great job when it brought in speakers who were liked, this success was only coincidental because teachers' input was still not sought. In fact, Tracy's actual requests were still not met although they probably could benefit all the English departments in the county. Similarly, Tracy's viewpoints about the excellent technology classes were also coincidental because teachers who were proficient in technology would view them as a waste of time and money. For example, Logan who was already proficient in technology would view technology workshops as a waste of time. Logan emphasized the need to

develop skills in for teaching English Language to Learners (ELL), not in technology. This is what Logan said,

One of the reasons I was attracted to [this place] is that there is a little more diversity in [this city]. And this is what I have found; I have students from Liberia and I have a lot Hispanics students here. I have a more diverse population. And so for my own professional growth, I need to learn to work better with those English is a second language [sic] *English Language Learners* [italics added]. So for my personal success, that's where I think that I need to grow the most. You know, I am not sure that everybody needs that. I think some people need technology more, but I am pretty [good] on technology. I [also] don't need more training on group work; I know how to handle group work. I need to train by working with [English Language Learners]. So I think that the [professional] development that I attend should help me to learn to cross that barrier, the language barrier.

Again, lack of teachers' input was denying people like Logan opportunity to attend a conference or workshop of choice that would enhance this goal. At the same time, causing many secondary school teachers to attend workshops that were designed for lower grade students was not only frustrating to them, it was also a waste of their time. Unfortunately, this problem was echoed by many. Jowie from the Cherry High School said this about professional development aimed at school improvement plan,

I think it is a double edged sword. It is good for us especially if the information does work well. We have things here from discipline to computer, so some of those are still very helpful. Other time it's more geared towards elementary level, and it is almost a waste in the secondary level.

Similarly, Jamie from Magnolia High School echoed yet more confusion over the goals of some professional development experiences that continued to be offered but that seemed irrelevant for secondary school educators. Jamie said,

In our school I think professional development has not been a huge I guess area of concern, I think most of the time. We have something that we did at the beginning of the year. For the in-service, we have been doing this learning focus for the last year or two, but it's not really being pushed, I don't even know - I think the learning focus is towards elementary level, I don't even see how well it would fit in a high school setting.

On the other hand, Cade explained that at Oak High School teachers were sponsored to conferences that helped them enhance their individual growth plan, and they were also provided workshops that were geared towards whole-staff development at the school site. Cade explained that professional development plans for whole-staff were usually decided by the school administrator,

It comes from the administration, [ideas for the professional development activities] usually as a response to a need ... Then the administrator will respond by giving us some training on it. Other times if there isn't a specific need, then administrator might just choose something that feels important and beneficial, [or just something that] is available at the time. Then because we are all get a paid conference; that pushes us to take advantage of that. And that would be more on our individual subject areas.

It is possible that some school systems failed to critically evaluate the type of professional development they were offering to their teachers. Kerry, who admitted it was a challenge to offer meaningful professional development, also indicated that previous professional development at Maple High School was based on contracts. Fortunately, Kerry was committed to changing that. This is how Kerry put it,

*They* [professional development programs] are extremely important. ... It's a huge challenge to provide really meaningful professional development. Of course in our state teachers are required 30 hours a year. At the current time we are operating on staff development plan that was developed before I came here. It's more like a contract so we are following that plan. But we are nearing the time when we will be developing our plan for next school year. It's very important to me that the elements of that are not mandated, [because] once we have our own flexibility, *it* [the professional development plan will] need to be tied directly to either our school improvement plan or to teachers' growth plan. Within those constraints then teachers should have input into what's meaningful to them. Unfortunately so much of our professional development is done after a long school day when teachers are tired anyway, and if it's something they have no choice in or interest in, we are fighting a losing battle.

Kerry admitted that it was a challenge to provide meaningful professional development. That is why teachers' input is critical. Kerry also acknowledged that professional development was often

offered in the afternoon when teachers were tired. Kris noticed this too and made a remark that professional development was offered after school when everybody was tired and nobody cared.

Unfortunately, schools were spending so much money on professional development programs to overlook these problems. Consequently, it is imperative that schools seek teachers' input into decision making, especially in matters regarding professional development programs. Shawn admitted that schools were spending lot of money on professional development programs, “We try to present as many opportunities we possibly can with the amount of money that we have and the time that we have, but I think it’s very important [professional development].”

Shawn also said,

They [Central Office] allow us so many days a year when the kids are not here to put our own professional development. The county will provide one [professional development]; like we are doing one this year with Dr. Bennett (name changed) ... they are paying him a great deal of money to come in to talk to the high schools teachers. That will be an all day session in professional development. Then we [the school will] have to provide our own. We are to set up the workshop that we planned this year ... [in which] they have to try a 90 minutes a week on physical activity.

Allowing teachers’ input even for the whole-staff developmental plan would provide administrators a list of ideas on what would benefit teachers and the school as a whole. As indicated, most teachers as well as the principals maintained that professional development was crucial for keeping teachers' skills updated with current research. That’s why it was imperative that schools take professional development programs seriously and incorporate site-based decision making. Frankie put it this way,

I think for a long period, things didn’t change very much in education. So the need for [professional development programs] was not that necessary. I think now with the diversity of the country, with diversity of economics, with diversity of building access to technology in certain areas, we are not teaching the typical student any more. So professional development is more important now than would have been just because our role are changing somewhat; the resources that we have are changing; students are

changing; and the society is changing. The education I got in college in a lot of ways is almost obsolete as far as what goes into class. So I think that if we are to keep up our way, the way to stay informed is through professional development.

Frankie's observation that because the new body of knowledge is continually growing and changing, teachers needed to keep their skills updated through professional development. Chuck also stated it this way,

Teacher[s] needs to be around other teachers, around people in their fields. Most ... good teachers want that. They want to go and see what other people are doing. They want to gain knowledge, which [should] be made more available [to them].

In summary, professional development is very useful and serves as a means for supporting school improvement plans and individual teacher's growth. Improved teachers' skill translates to students' benefits through improved teaching strategies. Unfortunately, the way professional development programs were being implemented, they were not being very effective. There was a general misunderstanding between teachers and the providers of developmental programs and teachers' input was not sought.

*Building Individual Teacher's Growth Plan.* As indicated, professional development that was intended to affect individual teachers directly in the areas they felt inadequate or incompetent was referred to as individual teacher growth plan. Based on the findings of this study, very few teachers were receiving support based on individual needs. Therefore, other than those few cases when teachers became intrinsically motivated to seek personal growth on their own, there were few reports about a concerted effort to support teachers in their personal growth.

As noted, few schools sent their teachers to conferences where individual teacher's skills could be updated. Few schools instituted intracurricular collaboration that also supported individual teacher's growth. As indicated, very collegial departments supported individual

teacher's growth in many ways including exchange of ideas, materials, and counseling. Although some schools offered training in technology that helped support some teachers' needs, not all teachers were in need of support in technology. Teachers who were proficient in technology would consider such workshops a waste of their time.

The study seems to indicate that shortage of funds was the main reason many schools failed to send teachers to conferences. Unfortunately, without sustaining teachers' skills with the research-based techniques and without instituting collaborative activities by which teachers could gain from others, schools were missing out. Successful teachers ensured students were challenged to their maximum potential, which translated to successful students.

Many teachers want to excel in their careers. They want to improve their present skills, gain new skills, and stay informed. Many teachers hoped that the school professional development programs could help. Unfortunately, without much support from school developmental programs, some teachers were forced to look for alternatives. In regard to teacher desire to stay informed and sustain continuous improvement, Carroll admitted to spending personal funds to attend workshops that supported personal growth. Unfortunately, the type of professional development workshops that Carroll attended were not even considered as professional development per school system definition. Carroll said,

[The] general professional development [of our system] is not that productive. ... because the selections are limited. Personally, the things that I do and personally sign for, because they help my ability be effective in my class, are not counted as professional development. So I attend them for my own professional well being, and then go back and pick something else that counts.

Following this statement, the researcher asked Carroll, "So you spend your personal money to get professional development?" Carroll admitted, "Yes", and went on to add that teachers

needed to have input into professional development. Similarly, Gale admitted to participating in professional development that was not sponsored by the school. Gale said,

I think [professional development] is extremely important and it changes constantly... I go to teacher's work shop in summer and I love it. I get excited about new ways to look at things. The things that I learn [are] extremely important because of the subject I teach. Ecology and environment plant is a subject that is constantly changing. The way professional development is offered [at our school] is not being effective. The [workshops] that I attend during the summer, where I go and stay for 3 to 4 days at a college, are actually some hands on experience.

The practice of teachers spending personal funds in professional development they hoped would meet their individual need seem widespread. Terry, who concluded it was a shame that schools were not sponsoring some professional activities, also expressed plans to attend a conference at Richmond Virginia. Terry said,

I think it is very, very important for practitioners to remain life-long learners. ... It is reasonable to make sure that we are keeping up; that we are not becoming stale. But I also think it is reasonable as professionals to develop a plan on an individual basis how we are going to do that. Our department, for example put in a paper work to go on a field trip as a department. ... But because [the field trip] did not fit into the entire staff, professional development plan, it was not approved. Now I understand why it wasn't approved. If you take the stand that the professional development activity we have must fall under some heading, then you can't approve things that don't fall under that heading. ... And I think that's awfully sad.... I have an opportunity next October to go to the Richmond Federal Reserve Bank and meet with chairman of the Federal Reserve Ben Bennett Bernanke and Jeffrey Lacker. Now that may mean nothing to any of my colleagues, but for me personally I would get more from that conference than I will anything else that I could be doing for staff development. ... Well, yeah I am going to go to that conference anyway, but it would be above and beyond my professional development I am expected to do as a teacher here. And I think that's a shame.

Other teachers including Jamie explained how shortage of funds dictated when teachers could attend a subject-related conference. Jamie narrated how teachers in the English department at Magnolia High School were able to attend a conference when it was brought to a close

distance. Jamie also noted that earning a sponsorship was turning out to be dependent on teacher's ability to persist. Jamie said:

Last year, the [conference for the] National Counsel of English, which none of us would have [attended] because they were often [offered] far as in New York, where we didn't have the funds to go, had their huge convention in Nashville. ... Obviously we could drive to Nashville, so we asked if we could go. I think we had to pay \$300 per person for the convention and the school system covered that. So I think in the last few years it has gotten better if you really show an interest.

Jamie went on to say,

[Recently] I was asked to teach a new class which has not been taught here before. I agreed to teach it but I said I really ... have not had training in creative writing since I was in college, and that's been at least 12 years ago. So they have said now that if I find a good in-service to get into, they will try to get some funding. So I think if you put forth an interest, you will get it; but as far as them coming to us with things, not so much. It's become a dig for your own opportunity.

This phrase from Jamie, 'dig for your own opportunity' seems to indicate that in some schools teachers have got to be intrinsically motivated to strive for personal growth. As mentioned, Logan's need, repeated here, was not the common one. Yet this need, based on the Logan's desire to serve a diverse student population effectively, was so justifiable. In fact, Logan stated that diversity was what made teaching at the Maple High School more interesting. This is what Logan said,

One of the reasons I was attracted to [this place] is that there is a little more diversity in [this city]. And this is what I have found; I have students from Liberia and I have a lot Hispanics students here. I have a more diverse population. So for my own professional growth, I need to learn to work better with those especially English is a second language. So for my personal success, that's where I think that I need to grow the most. You know, I am not sure that everybody needs that. I think some people need technology more. I [also] don't need more training on group work. I need to train by working with English as a Second Language. So I think that the [professional] development that I attend should help me to learn to cross that barrier, the language barrier.



Like Jamie, Jody's problems involved lack of funds. Jody explained that shortage of funds at the math department in Maple High School mandated that teachers take turns in attending national conferences. Luckily, Jody's math department was also one of those that could find support locally. However, Jody still maintained that attending national conferences would benefit teachers more. This is how Jody put it,

Our school does provide money [but] it would be nice if we could all go to a conference. There's just not that much money. So we as a department try to spread it out. We rotate each year so that one person doesn't go all the time. We usually try to send two people. So if those two people don't want to go, then we just rotate it around. But I think ... we are encouraged in the math department that we have a group of mathematicians in this area called the Upper East Tennessee Teachers of Mathematics. So for people that can't go to the national or regional conference, they're encouraged and welcome to the local things that we provide. I think we've done very well at the local community with funds for mathematics for teachers who can't afford. Sometimes school systems don't always pay to go to national meetings. So as a local group community, we've done really well at that. Not every community has what we have.

As mentioned, Cade's school was able to fund professional development both for individual growth plan and the school improvement plan. Cade said,

The school pays for professional development. Each teacher is allowed a certain amount per year for travel and [for] attending conferences, which would be professional development in our individual subjects. And then usually we have two or three days every year that are professional development days at the school.

Alex also spoke about how teachers use their money for individual growth plans and how the school was structured to meet those needs.

We really want to institutionalize staff development, not just make it fun for teacher to go. ... Our school improvement plan has been based on a curriculum area. This year it's social studies. So this year all the social studies teachers had the option to go to the national convention and it [was] paid for. ... Because our school is small I have the advantage of being able to *do that* [sponsor different groups of teachers]. What we do is to fund [in such a way] that each teacher gets about \$500 a year for staff development. So we ask if any of them are willing to give it up. So [those willing to give up] donate their staff development [money] because they know they are not going to go any place. [That

way] we are able to fund teachers who go to the national convention. So it's in shared governance ... that we [are able to] fund our school improvement plan.

Although the idea of sharing opportunities to attend conferences at Alex's school was great, it would be better if all teachers were to attend at least one conference in a year or two. If not, teachers could also be given opportunity to take a course at the college level that would help keep teaching skills updated. This was what Frankie was inferring to. Frankie stated that because of the new body of knowledge that was continuously growing, and because of the growing student needs, teachers needed to keep their skills updated through appropriate developmental programs. In fact, Kerry was already ahead in supporting teachers' input in the professional development programs. However, instead of offering teachers choice between whole-staff and individual teacher's growth plan, this study concluded that offering both would be the best solution for schools. Kerry stated,

Once we have our own flexibility, it needs to be tied directly to either our school improvement plan or teachers' growth plan. Within those constraints then teachers should have input into what's meaningful to them.

In summary, although many teachers were looking for professional development to support their sense of need for continued growth, to help update their skills, and keep them informed, many schools were offering whole-staff professional development workshops. Because of this, some teachers were spending their own money to satisfy the need for personal growth. This study indicated that schools that provided both whole-staff and individual teacher's growth plan were doing far much better.

#### *Promoting Positive Partnership with Parents*

This study indicated that parental involvement in secondary education is crucial, and it plays a major part in determining student success both in high school and beyond. The study also

indicated that there has been an increase of parental involvement at the target schools based on increased communication technology such as email, the on-line grade books, and cellular phones. Further, the study seemed to indicate that the technological gap, which was previously reported among many low-income families, was now closing. Moreover, as this gap continued to close, many parents were becoming informed about school activities and about their children's performance. However, even though parental involvement through these communication technologies was causing parental participation to improve, many educators indicated nothing could really equal the parent-teacher conferences. Therefore, even though educators enjoyed these fast communication technologies, they did not want parents to stop participating in the formal meetings. In fact, the formal parent-teacher meetings at the schools played a major part in influencing students' behavior. Improved student behavior, on the other hand, helped to enhance student's success in numerous ways.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) supported the idea that parental involvement in the education of their children helped to improve students' behavior and achievement. However, positive partnership with parents in the education of their children did more than improve students' achievement and performance. Deal and Peterson (1999) acknowledged that, "only when a solid and healthy partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish" (p.132). In fact, parental involvement in the education of their children was so critical that it improved the attendance rate; it improved students' attitude towards school; it helped to reduce the dropout rate; and it increased students' college-going rates. These results were especially significant in those schools where parental participation in the education of their children was mandatory. Conversely, negative students' attitude towards school and their

disrespectful behaviors to teachers may be contributing to new teachers leaving their jobs. Although many schools were now hiring highly qualified teachers, the rate at which new teachers were leaving their profession was very high.

As stated, Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized that a solid and positive partnership between the schools and parents was necessary in order for education to flourish. Unfortunately, establishing that positive partnership with parents was becoming very challenging for many school administrators. Even in schools where parental involvement was high, there were problems relating to the way parents tried to shove their responsibility to someone else; the kind of 'blame it on the teacher' attitude. Generally, educators were dismayed by the lack of concern displayed by some parents in the education of their children. Others were perplexed by the degree in which some parents tried to escape their responsibility to provide basic needs for their children. Some administrators explained how they spent more time dealing with parents and students' behavior than they did academics. These administrators expressed disappointment in the fact that they were continuously being drawn from their first priority, to be educators, in order to counsel parents about how to handle their children. Teachers also reported how they sometimes pleaded with parents for conferences with no success. Most of those who reported such difficulties were those who taught senior students and those who taught low-performing students.

The current research identified five behavioral patterns that parents displayed in their relationship with schools. These behavioral patterns seemed to be dictated by predictable circumstances. For example, parents behaved differently in schools where there were policies mandating their participation in the education of their children than in schools where there were

no such policies. In fact, where there was no school policy mandating parental participation, or where the policies were so weak, parental involvement was very low. In such schools, school leaders spent much of their time dealing with student behavioral problems on a daily bases. Conversely, where parental involvement was high or improving because of the school outreach programs, students' behavior and interest in school was reported to be better. As indicated, this study identified five behavioral patterns that parents displayed in their relationship with schools. These were classified in this manner: (1) parental involvement based on school policies to participate; (2) parental involvement based on the education of parents; (3) parental involvement based on a student's performance; (4) parental involvement based on the age of the student; and, (5) parental involvement based on the school outreach programs. This section about promoting positive partnership with parents covered (a) the five behavioral patterns that parents displayed in their relationship with school and (b) a section about 'developing positive partnership with parents'.

### *Research Finding*

*Parental Involvement Based on School Policies to Participate.* Previous research as well as this study revealed that the more informed parents were, the more likely they were to participate in the education of their children. However, even well informed parents slackened their participation in schools where demand for participation was relaxed. Consequently, schools that had established policies demanding parental participation experienced higher levels of parental involvement than those that had not. Although making parents participate in the education of their children did not always yield to a positive parent-school relationship, nevertheless, the stronger the school policies, the higher the level of parental involvement.

Accordingly, well defined school policies that stipulated parental role helped to keep many parents actively involved. For example at Oak High School, parents were expected to meet with the school teacher, the principal, and their child when their child was failing. The purpose of the meeting was to draw a contract for the failing student. Alex explained how this was done,

If there is a student struggling we usually meet with the parent, the student and the teacher (to) do a contract. ... Midterms gets sent home every 4½ weeks. [They] say whether or not [a] child has a 'D' or an 'F' in class. If [a child] has an 'F' the parents know they have to come in for a meeting. If [a child] has a 'D', it's just an alarm clock. Okay, you know something is not right - you need to get your acts together.

However, Cade emphasized the role of the school policy in supporting parental involvement at Oak High School and how fear of consequences for not adhering to the policy caused many to remain active. Cade stated that because the school was performing well and parents had to apply to get their children admitted at the school, they were also willing to comply with the school demands including remaining actively involved in the education of their children. In other words, because parents put value in the school success, they were not ready to miss out on it. This is what Cade said,

I think parents are involved in this school from the very start because they have to put an application for their child to [come] to this school. I think the parents know what the school stands for [when] they make that choice to get their child here.

Based on Cade's comment, it can be deduced that the school policy demanding parental involvement at Oak High School kept parental participation high. This in turn translated to sustainable good student performance. The concept about Oak High School performing well was also confirmed by Alex in this statement, "[The state] report card is pretty much a good accountability that shows what has happened. We've gone from 'C', 'D', and 'Fs' when I first

got here to now straight 'As' ... two years in a row." Jessie, a teacher at Oak High School, also acknowledged that because of the school policy, the administrator could hold parents accountable to work with the school. Although Jessie also noted that some parents tried to soften the school's expectations by seeking to water down class standards or by raising complaints against teachers, still more parents remained actively involved. Jessie concluded that the most important role school administrators could play where parental involvement was a requirement was to support teachers to sustain high expectations in their classroom and by reminding parents of the school's expectation for them. This is how Jessie illustrated this viewpoint,

Let me give you an example with geometry. Geometry is very different from algebra and it can be really hard even [for] students who are good in math. If it is your first year as a teacher, it is so easy for a parent to go to the principal and say, "Well this class is too hard [or] this test is too hard. ... A friend of mine who is a teacher looked at it and said the test is too hard; [that] the teacher is asking too much of this student and is not being realistic." You know, excuses, excuses, excuses. And the administrator will say, "No that's not true, this test is exactly where [students] should be if they want to go to college. They should be able to do this." ... [The administrator] will [also] give the students [some] strategies, for example, [the administrator will say to the student] you can do this and this, and there is the after-school help, and you can review or make corrections, and all the things that a good student should do to be successful. [Therefore, the administrator will] spill it back to the student [and say] may be you just need to work harder. And to the parent, [the administrator would say], "You need to support your child to work hard in this class."

As can be seen, in those schools where parental involvement was a requirement, the administrator could remind parents of their role in supporting positive attitude in children and in making use of school programs to support students' learning. It is important to emphasize that because Oak High School students were offered support services such as after-school tutoring, it was easier for the administrator to stand firmly and insist on the students and parents stepping up to the challenge. It is also equally important to emphasize that even though parental involvement was higher in schools that had policies mandating their involvement, not all parents understood

how to work collaboratively with schools in the education of their children. This negative parent-school relationship could eventually force schools to provide such parents with lessons about how to engage in positive partnership with them. Pat acknowledged that when parental participation was imposed, some parents tried to shift the blame to others. But, as stated, strong administrative support was what teachers required, to continue challenging students to work hard. Pat said,

Overall, the school is supportive about the vision. [However] I would argue that some parents are not as much, especially in a school that has high academic expectations. [Often times] parents and the students are the ones who blame everyone [else] but the student because so much is at stake. [Parents] look for scape goat instead of looking at their discipline system.

When Pat was asked to explain what ways the school could involve parents in the education of their children in a positive manner, Pat responded,

Conference with parents are beneficial and communication with them. The school has what we call contracts ... but some parents don't really take this seriously. ... There is probably a 50% who come in and say, you know I realize that my child is not doing his [or her] part and we need to set up some structures ... because they [are falling] behind. ... On the flip side, you have [that] parent whose students actually need to be disciplined and to be held accountable, and those are the parents who generally place the blame on everybody but themselves or the child. They blame the teachers and everyone else.

Although Pat stated that some parents still failed to take school contracts seriously, more parents became actively involved in the education of their children in the schools where mandatory participation had been imposed than where they had not. In fact, Pat acknowledged that students performed better and were more likely to continue with higher education when their parents became actively involved, "Generally, students whose parents were actively involved in their education performed better and were more likely to continue with higher education."



Again, relating to school policies, mandatory parent participation, and the need to educate some parents about how to engage in positive relationship with schools, Devin indicated some parents reverted to uninvited gossips. Although Devin also acknowledged that this behavior was not common among parents, nevertheless, the behavior was not conducive to a positive parent-school relationship. This is the way Devin put it,

Parental involvement in this school is not a problem at all in terms of support for students. Some parents frequent the school every day. ... Some come inside; I see some parents virtually everyday. [But] parental involvement in this school can also be detrimental in terms of parents tending to form opinions about certain faculty or certain administration. My personal belief is that parental opinions about faculty and administration should not play a role at all. There should be communication between teachers and parents, and communication between administration and parents. And there is very, very strong communication between parents and faculty and parents and administration in this school. But some parents at this school can be very opinionated. I suppose it is difficulty to express properly [what I mean. But I guess] there are certain things that can't be expressed politically correctly, I don't know.

Dylan concurred with Devin's observation about some parents visiting classes virtually every day. Dylan said, "I think we have a lot of parental involvement here, but I think the problem we run into is that some parents can wear teachers out."

As can be deduced from these different comments, more parents become actively involved in the education of their children when there are policies in school demanding their participation and when there are potential consequences attached to not adhering to those policies such as child expulsion from school. Although some parents did not seem to know how to engage in positive relationship with schools, where mandatory participation was imposed parental involvement was higher and students performed better than where it was low. Riley, a teacher at Dogwood High School, confirmed this assumption and asserted that this was what made most private schools successful. Riley, who had some experience teaching in a private

school, compared the experiences of parental involvement in the private school with that of the public schools,

Well, I have told you I have some experience teaching in private schools ... [Whenever] we played a football game, it was typically [our private school] against a public school. ... [But when we played] our side of the line would have five to six hundred people [parents] and on their side there would be twelve to fifteen people that were there to watch the game. ... And you could see in the outcome of the school year that our school achieved, but those schools [public] were not achieving; all because of [lack of] parental involvement. I had a hundred and sixty students, just like I do here. [When] we had open house for parents to come in and meet teachers, I would have three hundred and twenty parents ... because everyone of them and [their] other relatives would be there. They [wanted to be] involved in their children's life. So I guess when I say parents are not involved in the high school level, I have resigned myself to the fact that in public system it is that way, but it isn't that way everywhere, and certainly not in the private schools. And it shouldn't be that way [anywhere]. I am convinced that parents need to be involved totally. If there was more involvement, [public schools] would be different. But I think it all begins with the courage to expel the bad apples. We don't have the moral courage to get rid of the bad apples [the same way private schools get rid of their bad ones].

Riley was right about the need for parents to become involved in their children's education in public schools. However, in public schools, leaders were not empowered enough to enforce school policies that would not be politically challenged. According to Hoy and Miskel (2005), bureaucratic in many public school policies made it hard for leaders to implement and enforce new policies efficiently. To make schools more efficient, states may need to allow more site-based decision making, encourage teachers' input as a means to support school improvement plans, and support the idea of educating parents to develop positive partnership with schools in the education of their children. In fact, all schools, private and public, suffer in some way in regard to weak relationship with some parents. However, given the positive impact parents make in the education of their children, the idea of schools reaching out to partner with them would be a worthy course. Morgan, on the other hand, had no experience teaching in private schools like Riley. But this is what Morgan said about the school of one of the friend's daughter.

You have asked about parents. I don't think parents participate any more when kids get to high school. Well, I take that back because a friend of mine says parental involvement at her daughter's school is mandatory. Students in her daughter's school are very well behaved, but the students in many private schools are good anyway. [Students] seem to love school more than in public school and they do well.

Morgan indicated that mandatory participation supported students' performance and attendance. Again, although Morgan comparison were based on what others were saying, many researchers such as Deal and Peterson (1999) and Henderson and Mapp (2002), as well as this research, support the idea that parental involvement in the education of their children helped to improve students' behavior, reduce dropout rate, attendance, performance, and college-going rate. In regard to how parental involvement support students' behavior, Ashton, a teacher at Magnolia High School, said,

I don't think we have enough parental involvement. You know like I said you hear the old story it takes a village to raise a child. Well, I think more parents should be a part of that. If they don't make these kids follow rules and regulations, we can't.

Ashton was, therefore, supporting the idea that improving students' behavior at schools requires a concerted effort. Tracy, on the other hand, compared last year's students behavior with what was happening this year at Dogwood High School based on the enthusiasm that was being generated by the GEAR UP program at the school. Tracy confided,

Well, this year we have a new parent pioneer and they are mostly concerned about the school morale and also about how our school is perceived in the community. Last year we had a terrible year. But they [parents] are about building the confidence and perception of the school.

In summary, mandatory requirement for parental participation in the education of their children sustained their involvement at a higher level. This high participation was reported to help improve student behavior, attendance, and performance and was also associated with higher college-going rate.

*Parental Involvement Based on the Education of Parents.* This study confirmed that the level of parental education does correlate with the level at which parents became involved in the education of their children. However, as indicated earlier, even knowledgeable parents relaxed their participation if the school has not imposed policies demanding their participation. Therefore, although Shawn noticed parental participation to be higher at Cherry High school, there was likelihood that this participation could be improved with school policies mandating parental involvement. This is what Shawn said,

The parents [of Cherry High School students] are more informed; so we have more students going to college. The more informed the parents are, the less they need information about those programs needed for their children to go to college. Generally, the more educated the parents are, the more likely their children will go to college also.

But Rikki elaborated further on the role education played in improving parental participation in the education of their children. Rikki observed,

I think that the biggest problem that our school faces is that a lot of our parents are not very educated. [They] never went to college; [they] don't know what it's like [to be there, they don't know] what it takes to get there, or to maintain there. I think that the big fight our school [faces] is to help kids understand that this is what it takes to get there; this is what it takes to stay there; and this is what it takes to be successful there. And I think we are addressing some of those [issues] with our program [the GEAR UP program]. I think that [the GEAR UP program] is making a lot of progress with our kids.

Rikki observed that unlike the parents who have never been to college or even completed high school, those who have had these experiences know what type of advice and support their children needed to be successful. Unfortunately, low parental education could also lead to parents pulling back much needed support for their high achieving children. Skyler, after answering a question about parental involvement among students in honors class, spoke about gifted students from parents who were less educated. Skyler said these students still became motivated to learn, "They [students] are the best because they are highly motivated." However,

Skyler also observed that lack of confidence and low esteem in the students' parents caused them to want to pull back much needed support for their high achieving children, "[But] the parents pull back because their kids are smarter than they are and because *they* [their children] have better education." Skyler also added this remark,

I think the mark of [a good] teacher is [one] that will have a rapport with students. You can't teach a child unless they trust you and have a relationship with you. So you become the surrogate mom or dad while they are here.

In summary, this research supported the evidence that the less educated parents were, the less they participated in the education of their children. Sometimes, this lack of participation was based on lack of confidence about how to participate, and other times it was as a result of not knowing how to participate.

*Parental Involvement Based on a Student's Performance.* This study also indicated that where parental involvement was not mandatory, parental involvement was influenced by a student's performance. Parental involvement was high when their child was performing well and low when a child was not performing well. Although this study did not fully explore this area, there was likelihood that when parents failed to provide much needed encouragement and support for their failing children, these students developed low esteem and had greater likelihood of dropping than those who received support. In other words, there was likelihood that these could become at-risk students.

Many teachers expressed great disappointment in the fact that parents of students who were not performing well were the least likely to participate in the parent-teacher conferences. Pat put it this way, "A lot of times, parents whose children needed more help were those that

failed to take advantage of the parent conferences or to exercise discipline on their children”.

Similarly, Kris referring to students who were not performing well in math classes said,

My students are better than ever. The top students are getting much, much better. The students I have now are better than students I had ten years ago. They are more motivated, they work harder, and they are involved in all kinds of things. They are more complete humans. But what I think is happening is that just like the economic situation, we are separated. Those at the lower end are achieving less, and I think from what I hear from teachers who teach those lower end classes, parents [are not getting] involved at all. But my [students'] parents [have no problem]; so any support I want is there.

Jody's students were also in the upper performing level. Although these parents were participating, much of the parents' participation for Jody's students was through the Internet.

This form of participation left the parents satisfied even though Jody would have preferred to see them in person at parent-teacher conferences. This is what Jody said,

Since I teach Trigonometry and Pre-Calculus, most of my parents are pretty involved. We have a web site where students and parents can email teachers. I can email information about students' progresses as quickly as possible, which keeps the parents of [my] students pretty involved. I guess the one big disappointment I have with parents is that when we have open house, we still see so few parents. This last open house, I had out of 65 students, three sets of parents [that] showed up.

Interestingly, Skyler's surrogate role with the regular students did not seem very productive as it was with the gifted students, assuming Skyler still practiced it. Skyler said,

I teach [some] honors kids [and these] are highly motivated. [However] the regular class I have is like a wrestler and primarily so because of their home life. Nobody is home to motivate them; [nobody is home] to make sure their priority is to have quality education. [Therefore] they [perceive life in the form of] present pay-day; they don't look down the road and know there is [another] pay day someday. Because they are fending for themselves; the financial responsibility and the running of the household is based on the paycheck they [are] receiving [today].

Tracy also spoke about not being able to see the parents of those students who were not performing well, “I had four [parents] during the parents-teacher conference, and none of them

were really the ones I wanted to see.” Kim expressed similar disappointment at not being able to see the parents of students who were not performing well in class,

Maybe students don’t tell their parents go see my teacher because they don’t want parents to see any teacher. Like I said, the worst students are the ones whose parents you want to see. But those are the *ones* [parents] who don’t come to teacher conferences.

In summary, this study indicated that parents of students who were not performing well were participating less in the education of their children than parents of those who were performing well.

*Parental Involvement Based on the Age of Student.* The study also indicated that when parental participation was not imposed, participation of many parents became less as the students grew older. The older their child became, the less parents became involved. Jowie, who only taught senior classes, was one of those who experienced this problem. Jowie said,

Sadly, we are not seeing that [parental involvement]. It’s like when [students] get to certain age, parents cut the strings. I teach these upper [senior] level classes and parents are not involved any longer. [In fact], at the parents-teacher-conferences, I am pretty much the loner. I wait, wait, wait, wait and never see the parents, even when I make request of them, I don’t see them. I have the email addresses [for the parents, but I] don’t get any communication.

Jowie went on to say,

That’s just pretty much with my classes, the upper classes. And it’s really a sad thing; parents don’t get involved as they used to be. Now we see it [involvement] on the lower level classes like in the ninth and tenth grade, but once those kids get the driving license, that’s it.

Jowie also added that the school had done everything possible, “Well we’ve done everything, I have called them, I have emailed because I have their email addresses; it’s a sad situation. We’ve tried”. Like Jowie, Jody was also puzzled by the fact that parents showed up for conferences when their children were in the lower grades but not when they moved to the upper classes,

[Parents] show up in elementary, they show up in middle school, but I guess when they get into high school [parents don't see the need for showing up]. My parents were there all the time. If the doors were opened at the school, my parents were there. I guess parents are busier today than when I was in school.

Kim also compared parental involvement in the lower grades with the high school grades,

This last year I was really impressed. Freshman involvement was phenomenal, great! Sophomore was okay. But [from] juniors and seniors, [parents] never see the teachers again. This year for example, I had no senior parent whatsoever at the teacher-conference. I had one parent in early junior. [But] really [when you] think of it, we have the parents-teachers association, which really helps a lot, and we have very involved parents through the program, especially when [students] are younger. [But past those lower grades] there is a fall off. Of course I know we say, "Get older." But then again, maybe students don't tell their parents go see my teacher because they don't want parents to see any teacher.

Similarly, Tracy talked about not seeing the parents of older students and also not seeing the parents of those students who were not performing well.

I will tell you this, once the students get to high school, parents for the most part are not as involved as they were in elementary and middle school. I had four during the parents-teacher conference, and none of them were really the ones I wanted to see.

Riley, whose comment had been quoted above, made similar observation about less participation in high school, "So I guess when I say parents are not involved in the high school level, I have resigned myself to the fact that in the public system it is that way, but it isn't that way everywhere."

In summary, when parental participation was not imposed, participation of many parents became less as the children grew older. The older a student became, the less the parents became involved in his or her education.

*Parental Involvement Based on the School Outreach Programs.* This study also indicated that there were many parents who wanted to become involved in the education of their children but didn't know how. It was for such parents that some schools were providing support systems



to educate them to become actively involved in the education of their children. The GEAR UP and the Jump-start programs were both aimed at supporting parents to become more actively involved in the education of their children. Although some programs like the GEAR UP were too new to determine how well they will continue doing, the enthusiasm they were generating by causing many parents to participate was worth bringing into the limelight.

In particular, the GEAR UP program was playing a major role in advising and educating parents and students in many areas including where to find educational support, when to decide between the vocational and the college preparatory courses, how to apply for scholarships and grants, and so on. Students who desired to attend colleges were advised to begin taking college preparatory courses as early as possible to avoid waiting until the senior year only to realize they were short in preparatory college credits. Of course, students who were on vocational path could still continue in their vocational programs at college.

The GEAR UP model adopted by the Dogwood High School was designed to engage counselors from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The way the program operated was that it engaged several counselors. Each of these counselors was assigned a few students and their parents at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Each counselor then began giving much needed counsel to their small group; however, these counselors went beyond ordinary school counselors in that they visited members of their small group at their homes and got to know them better. By so doing, they became informed about the home environment so that they were able to provide a more focused support based on the home needs. Ordinarily, each counselor would be expected to move up with his or her small group to the next grade, and the next, until the students are in the eighth grade. However, the

GEAR UP model adopted by Dogwood High School necessitates counselors to continue with their small group until the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, when the students graduate.

Many educators at Dogwood High School where the GEAR UP program had been implemented expressed their surprise at the impact the program was beginning to generate. Of course for this high school, the students who were under the GEAR UP support were only in their freshman year. However, teachers were beginning to express their admiration for the subtle progress the program was making not only by the enthusiasm it was generating through increased parental participation of the freshman students but also by the strange interest it was quietly stirring among the juniors and seniors. Because the senior and junior students who were not part of the GEAR UP program were allowed the benefit of receiving advice and support at the school site from the GEAR UP counselors, the number of students reported to be inquiring advice about how to get scholarships, grants, and other financial aid or how to prepare for the ACT exams was encouraging. Some teachers reported change in attitude among students and explained about parents being involved in supporting the school image. Unfortunately, because the GEAR UP program was still very new at Dogwood High School, it would be hard to declare its success at the moment. However, based on the practicality of the ideas the program was interjecting about how to keep parents actively involved, supporting future investment on the continuation and expansion of this program would be worthwhile. Shawn, who was the liaison for the GEAR UP program with one of the regional universities last year, said “The GEAR UP program was very beneficial to the students at Dogwood High School.” Shawn also added,

[The program] was about getting into homes. Counselors get into the homes of kids at middle school level and educate the parents as to the need for their children to go to college. They educate parents as to how they can do it, they educate them about financial aids, about grants and scholarships. They plant that seed down at the sixth grade level

rather than waiting till junior and senior high and trying to educate them then. [So they] educate them down here so that as they go through it, they can help level out until high school.

Alex also expressed support for the GEAR UP program,

[One of the regional counties] has started a program where there are counselors that move up with kids and they are starting to teach them what their options are. I think that's a wonderful program. The counselors begin when [students] are in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and they go in and start teaching [them] and talking [to them] about different careers that are available and the path [they can] take to get to that career. And then [they] move with that class to the seventh grade and on to the eighth grade, until they go on to the high school *until students graduate in high school* [italics added]. [The counselors] then rotate back to the sixth grade. So you start with them from the sixth grade, then in the seventh, then in the eighth ... You stay with those kids ... making them see that there are goals that they can reach and here is the path you need to take to get there. They need that person that they can connect with. [That person] that is actually helping them [to reflect] about where they want to go in life.

This added support to students, as noted by Alex, should be the basis for supporting the continuation and expansion of the ideas introduced by the GEAR UP program. Kim, on the other hand, took the liberty of accentuating the magnitude of enthusiasm the program was generating at the school,

This year I was really impressed. Freshman involvement is phenomenal. Great!  
Sophomore is okay. Juniors and seniors ...

As indicated, the GEAR UP program was only in its freshman year at Dogwood High School where Kim taught. Riley also said this about the GEAR UP program,

Principal Dominique has been doing a tremendous job of getting parental involvement here within the athletic programs, and now within the academic program they are trying very hard with the Gear- up program and a lot of positive things are being reported. We are given our best shot within our limitation because we are a public school. And many of our parents have got to work two or three jobs because we are in the county, and we are not in the highest demographic area.

However, Rikki was looking at the program in terms of educating parents. Rikki explained how the GEAR UP program was being used to educate those parents who lacked the understanding about how to support their children. Rikki said,

I think the more that the school makes things available, and when I am saying things I am talking programs through our guidance departments, through scholarship programs, through what else is available for these students to be able to attend. I think that the biggest problem that our school faces is that a lot of our parents are not very educated, never went to college, don't know what it is like, don't know what it takes to get there or be there or to maintain there. I think that is the big fight our school [has to face. It] is to help kids understand that this is what it takes to get there, this is what it takes to stay there, this is what it takes to be successful there, and I think we are addressing some of those with our program [the GEAR UP program]. I think that [this] is making a lot of progress with our kids.

However, Tracy connected the program with improving student behavior and the school image.

This is what Tracy said,

Well this year we had a new parent pioneer (reported to be working with the GEAR UP counselors) and they are mostly concerned about the school morale and also about how our school is perceived in the community. Last year we had a terrible year. But they [parents] are about building the confidence and perception of the school.

Similarly, Tyler, another teacher at Dogwood High School, noticed how parental involvement with the support of the GEAR UP program was stirring up positive involvement in older students,

We have 'parents that are concerned' at the school, and they are getting involved with things about our image at the community, which is making a good impact. Actually, I don't know how they are doing it but I heard- I think they are working together with the GEAR UP group. This is the first year we are having a freshman group that was under the GEAR UP program and I don't know if it is because of the concerned parents or the GEAR UP group that we are seeing some positive things. In particular, I am hearing more students asking about scholarships and grants. I think the GEAR UP group is stirring up that in many of my students. I like it.

In addition to the GEAR UP programs, parents were also being offered evening lessons about how to use computers at the Cherry High School. This is what Jackie said,

We have started a math lab and we are doing it right here. I have whole set of computers coming in and we'll try to give kids that extra time to use. Now they are putting an entire lab that will create all areas, not just math, so that there is technology that will be available. We also have it available to parents; we try to do some evening sessions.

Alex also explained that when parents sign a contract, the school tries to educate them about how they could set up the home environment, especially when a student was not doing homework.

This is what Alex said,

A contract is a plan of how we can make sure our students are successful. ... When a child is not doing his homework we come up with a plan of how the parent can set up the home so that that child can be successful.

In summary, this study indicated that the school outreach strategies such as the GEAR UP program were generating positive impact on student behavior and parental participation. Because of the positive impact GEAR UP was generating, it would be worth borrowing some of those ideas and investing on their adoption in all schools.

#### *Developing Positive Partnership with Parents*

Parental involvement in the education of their children plays a significant role and translates to other benefits. Henderson and Mapp (2002) asserted that parental involvement in the education of their children helped to improve students' behavior and achievement. However, positive partnership with parents in the education of their children did more than improve students' behavior and achievement. As indicated, parental involvement in the education of their children improved student attendance rate, reduced student dropout rate, improved student performance, all of which influenced the rate of going to college. These results became more evident in those schools where parental participation in the education of their children was imposed and where the consequences of nonparticipation held potential for a negative impact. Conversely, schools where parental participation was low, negative students' attitude towards

school and disrespectful behaviors towards their teachers were noticed. These negative behaviors may be why many new teachers quit their jobs.

Deal and Peterson (1999) acknowledged that, “only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish” (p.132). As noticed, the GEAR UP program was playing a major role in advising and educating parents and raising the awareness of student support at the school level. The program was designed to provide support in those schools where the students’ free or reduced lunch rate was high. Reports from the school where it was implemented were that seniors and juniors were seeking advice about how to apply for scholarships and grants, how to prepare for ACT and the SAT tests, and other advice pertaining to college-going. Therefore, given this positive impact that the GEAR UP program was generating, it may be worth borrowing and implementing some of its ideas in other schools. In particular, the ideas from the GEAR UP program to counsel those parents who did not know how to support the education of their child was paramount. Therefore, even though some schools may not need to implement the GEAR UP program in full spectrum, it would make sense for such schools to adopt some parts of the program. For example, instead of putting all parents under the GEAR UP counselors, schools could identify those families that would be in great need of counseling support and extend these services to them until their child graduates. Therefore, the degree and number of counselors that a school could employ would depend on the need. However, based on the positive impact the GEAR UP program was generating and based on the problems identified in the parent-school relationships, even for those schools that were doing well, the ideas of GEAR UP program would be worth supporting for future investment and expansion in all schools. In fact, no one understood the urgency of developing good partnership

with parents better than Kerry whose dissertation was on parental involvement in secondary education. Kerry emphasized how the schools were missing out without that partnership,

It's unfortunate that students, educators and parents they are like three legs of a stool, and each one has been happy to be convinced by the other two that parent involvement is not really important at the secondary level. Those kids really don't want us here, and that kind of a thing. And it's really a bill of goods that nobody ought to buy. Now that doesn't mean that parent involvement takes the same shape or has the same face as did back in elementary school. But it's still very important and it's probably, I think - its one of the best predictors of whether or not a student is really going to be successful or not.

The last part of Kerry's statement is worth noting because it signifies the premises about which the schools, the state, and the national government should strive to support good partnership with parents in the education of their children. Kerry stated parental involvement is "one of the best predictors of whether or not a student is really going to be successful or not," In that case, educating parents to collaborate with schools in the education of their children would imply supporting schools in their fundamental goals, producing successful students. Kerry also emphasized, "That is one of the things that I want to work on most here [at Maple High School]; the positive link influencing the degree to which parents felt part of the secondary school experience with their students." Pat also made this important observation, "Generally, students whose parents were actively involved in their education performed better and were more likely to continue with higher education." Pat indicated that parents play an important role in supporting students' continuation to higher education. However, based on Pat's comment, schools exist for the purpose of teaching children. Therefore, if developing good relationships with parents enabled schools to enhance those fundamental goals, then striving to improve that relationship should become a priority. Similarly, Kasey emphasized the great potential parents held for influencing interest of education in their children. Unfortunately, many parents did not seem to

understand they had this potential. Therefore, many were not striving to influence their children in a positive way. This was why educating parents to become actively involved in the education of their children and to engage in positive relationship with schools would be so crucial. This is what Kasey said,

I think that parental influence is the most important influence that a child will have when it comes to education. Parents can excite children with the idea of education; they can teach them to love school when they are young. Students can come to school ready to learn because their parents love learning themselves. ... [However] what I have found is that as the years go by, parents are becoming more interested in themselves and their jobs than with their children and education. Children are coming home where there are no parents. [Although] parents want their children to make good grades, they are not willing to sacrifice their time for their children.

As Kasey stated, parents played a very important role in influencing the attitude of their children about education. Unfortunately, Jackie was becoming disappointed that parents were not taking responsibility to provide and support their children. Jackie complained about the time it was taking to counsel some parents to take responsibility for their children and to counsel those who wanted to give up on their children,

Parents take up a lot of my time, and it's not a problem except that for some issues, I don't think I would let the school handle them if those were my children. I do a lot of counseling with parents on how to handle their kids. ... It's amazing to me all the information you get to know as the administrator, stuff that you really don't want to know except that that it ends up on my lab because of some situations. ... I also have kids who are hungry everyday, and I have kids that don't have even the basic needs everyday. So I am finding myself almost pulled from the education part because of these fundamental things that they [parents] are not giving. I also have kids who don't want to do anything, and parents say I can't really make him. He has been doing this for years.

Jackie reemphasized that statement, "Parents should never give up on their children". Based on Jackie's statement about how counseling parents was taking so much time, these problems would be better handled by a professional counselor than by an educator. Further, based on Jackie's description of some of these parents, it would make sense to identify those who really needed



continued professional counseling support. These parents could then be placed under the guidance of some GEAR UP type of counselors to receive regular counseling support, possibly until their child graduates. These parents could become educated through these counselors about how to exercise home authority and how to work with schools to impart positive values in their children. Providing such support to such parents could help to take care of this next question from Jackie,

How far do we reach? We are supposed to be educators. We deal with school attendance and disciplinary problem. Sometimes we see the same types of kids over, and over, and over. So [we] are spending a majority of [our] time on these many fires, sometimes big problems. [We also] worry about safety [issues] ... all [these] take a lot of time sometimes than it takes in the academics. ... Some things will have to change.

Jackie's observations that educators were not fully equipped to handle some counseling jobs were correct. Therefore, engaging GEAR UP type of counselors would enable Jackie to return to that area of interest, being the educator. Unfortunately, Dominique the principal at Dogwood High School, was also experiencing similar frustrations with the time it was taking to deal with disciplinary problems instead of academics. Although some of Dominique's teachers were expressing encouraging results based on the GEAR UP program, some of the parents and students in Dominique's school were still experiencing problems and could benefit from counseling support. Therefore, identifying these families from the sophomore, junior, and seniors and extending similar GEAR UP support would not only ease some of Dominique's frustrations, but it would also help to provide much needed counseling to the families. This is what Dominique said,

You know we are very fortunate here to have some very good parents. [But] it's kind of like the society. What percentage of the population is always in trouble with the law, and as administrators what percentage of your day is spent with the difficult students than with the good students.

Dominique and Jackie were both right in concluding that difficult students should not be allowed to take valuable time from school leaders so that they fail to serve good students as well.

However, looking at this problem from a more critical angle, school leaders will not be able to evade some parental problems until schools begin to extend similar support as those provided by the GEAR UP counselors to some of their parents. Transferring the counseling responsibility to the expertise in this area would also imply handing over to those in better positions to critically analyze which family problems really needed counseling and which actually need to be turned over to law enforcement. Jackie emphasized fear for security in the school. In addition, allowing professional experts to handle counseling problems would allow Jackie and Dominique to become more effective in their professional areas, leading in the educational setting. Further, given the trend of escalating school problems within the larger society, it would make sense to begin allowing professional experts to begin handling counseling problems rather than educators. In fact, Adrian, the assistant principal at Magnolia High School, maintained that many of the problems schools were facing were just a reflection of what was going on in the families.

Adrian pointed to the fact that parents no longer give directions to their children, that parents were too busy, and that many children went home unattended. Adrian went on to say that parents did not appreciate schools or the work that teachers were doing. Adrian said,

What has changed is the family over the years. Many students are home by themselves. Parents do not give as much support [or] directions to children as they used to, and kids do not go to Sunday Schools anymore. So what we are seeing are the reflection of what is happening at home. Sometimes in this job when I call somebody [a parent] and want to discuss how we can help their child to do better, some have cursed at the teacher because they don't appreciate what the teacher is doing. And so I say, you are missing the point here to curse the teacher who is trying to help your child.

Based on Adrian's statement, it can be deduced that the more some parents were left out from participating in the education of their children, the more they neglected their fundamental responsibility, their children. Further, the more parents neglected this fundamental responsibility, the more some parents treated schools like their baby-sitting institutions. Like Jackie, Adrian was puzzled at the way some parents failed to exercise authority over their children or to break from a family cycle. More parents were also giving up on their children. Adrian said,

I used to be an elementary school principal. And some of the parents who had problems when they were kids now have children of their own who have same problems. It's like a cycle you can't break. And those are some of the problems schools face. We have parents who don't have good parenting skills. So how do we expect that they will be pushing about study habits [on their kids]? If a parent left school before the age of 16, what values are they going to push on their children about study habits?

Again, Adrian was specific to the point in regard to the poor parenting problems schools were experiencing and about students' receiving no support at home. These factors would support the viewpoint that schools need more of the GEAR UP type of counselors to help educate and counsel some parents and to act as the bridge between the home environment for some students and the school. In fact, Adrian continued to speak more about the situations of this type of parenting,

Sometimes in this job I counsel parents. Some of them have sat there and said they can't do anything with their child. I had one parent one day who said, "My son hits me." I said do you enjoy this, and she said no. I said I can tell you how to stop it, and I mentioned bringing in the police. She said I can't do that; he is my baby. I said are you telling me you enjoy him hitting on your face? She said no, no. I said you have to choose to deal with it; call the police. And if you are not willing to call the police on your son who hits you on your face, this conversation is over. Now, the kid who was hitting on his mom, is now seventeen, and has a kid of his own. So do you think the cycle will stop?

The perception that schools were a reflection of what was happening in the general society was expressed by many other educators, not just Adrian. Unfortunately, even though

educators have some skills in counseling, they lack the expertise to handle many of the problems schools are encountering. This is where the support from the state and the national government becomes crucial. The need to support schools in educating parents to form positive partnership with schools in the education of their children is critical. Therefore, the state and the national government could support schools by funding these GEAR UP types of programs to provide some needed counseling to some parents and their children and to support them in forming positive relationships with schools. As Jackie and Dominique acknowledged, trying to occupy the counseling position was taking too much of these educators' time and denying them the opportunity to serve others effectively. Consequently, in relating to the goals of this study, students and parents who were taking too much time from school leaders were in essence denying others opportunity to experience school climate that focused on students' performance and achievement. Therefore, they were indirectly impeding on school culture that influence college-going rate in their school. That's why the need to counsel and educate parents to form positive partnership with schools was so critical.

*Establishing Partnership with Local Industries, Colleges, and Universities*

Many schools were actually building partnership with some local industries as well as the regional colleges and universities. One local industry was offering incentives to hire students when they completed high school and after they take at least 2 years of college. Chuck explained how that local industry has been providing these incentives to students,

We usually have different groups come in during our school Career Day. For example, [this regional company] sends someone here to talk to seniors about working in the company. [The company] provides incentives [to students] about working there [and] also [educate them] about the credits they look for [in order to be hired there].

Chuck also mentioned three institutions of higher education that were often represented at the Career Day. Desiree also explained about the incentives being offered by the same local industry to the students at Cherry High School, and Shawn explained that the school was in the process of beginning a partnership with the same local industry in order to serve the community better. In regard to what the industry was doing Desiree said,

This [regional company] has been very supportive of our students and I hear they are doing the same in other schools. Anyway, they have been offering incentives to hire students who will complete high school and take at least 2 years of community college.

These comments by Chuck and Desiree were actually confirmed by several teachers and principals about how their schools were offered incentives by the same local industry. Some teachers also explained that local universities and colleges were participating in school Career Day. These regional colleges and universities were reported to offer incentives for admission to their institutes and possible scholarships and grants. In addition, some high schools were being used as the school lab by some of these regional universities and colleges, while others had someone working as a liaison between them and the local universities or colleges. In this aspect Shawn said, "I was the liaison for the program and our regional university".

In summary, support from local industries, colleges, and universities in the form of incentives could become very useful to high school students and play a role in influencing college-going rate. Local industries, colleges, and universities could also support schools by allowing those parents who work with them time to participate in school conferences. Colleges and universities could also offer courses that support schools' needs and support with student tutors.

### *Building Students' Ownership of Their Learning and the College Going*

Above all, schools exist for the purpose of educating children. It was therefore most important that all school activities focus on student learning. The study identified five basic characteristics of successful school culture that focused on student learning. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the five important characteristics were: communicating high expectation to all stakeholders, building a strong learning community, promoting positive partnership with parents, establishing partnership with local industries, colleges, and universities, and focusing on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education. All five characteristics held the potential for nurturing self-efficacy in students so that students felt capable to embark on other important projects such as continuing with higher education.

The term, "student's ownership of learning" was again conceptualized from a participant statement. The concept was drawn to indicate students' growth towards that person who would value education, become a self-directed learner, seek to maximize knowledge through self-directed investigation or exploration, be able to analyze, classify, synthesize, and evaluate information or concepts successfully, and embrace continued learning. The term was used to exemplify the nurturing processes that would be essential in strong school cultures to develop self-confidence in students about their ability to succeed on their own. Therefore, the ultimate goals for building student's ownership of learning would be to develop students' confidence about their potential to succeed on their own, including potential to succeed in postsecondary education. As stated earlier in Chapter 1, a student efficacious development was an indirect consequence of the schooling processes the student received. The stronger the nurturing culture,

the more self-aware a student became of his or her own ability to exert effort to become successful, including success in colleges and universities. Therefore, the more schools emphasized high expectations and combined these with support for students the more students strove to step up to the challenge and the more self-assured they became of their ability to succeed. Bandura (1993, 1997) referred to self-efficacy as a person's judgment that he or she is capable of organizing and carrying out the plan of action necessary to achieve a certain level of performance successfully. Therefore, for schools to improve their college-going rate, they would need a culture that nurtures self-efficacy in students.

Hopefully, by creating concerted support through forming partnership with parents in the education of their children and by establishing support from the general community, local businesses, and the institutes of higher education, schools would be instilling self-confidence in students. Further, by continuously challenging students to sustain high performance, by inviting them to embark on challenging projects while providing good support, and by providing diverse avenues for them to express growth in content knowledge, schools would be instilling self-efficacy in students. Students' self-confidence and efficacy would be essential for developing beliefs about their potential to embark on larger projects successfully, including college education. Nevertheless, developing such students would require establishing a strong culture that would continually support students' success and confidences. Such a culture would require a concerted effort from all stakeholders. The analogy of an African proverb, "It takes a village to raise-up a child" epitomizes this type of concerted effort that would be needful for a successful school culture that would not only influence student college-going rates but would influence their lives even after college. This culture would need to focus on students' ownership of

learning, performance, and for the purpose of this study, continuation to higher education. In regard to need to develop student ownership of learning, Kerry said,

I believe that as educators it is our responsibility to provide both the learning environment and the content to allow students to fully develop all kinds of talents and abilities. Probably the largest change in my philosophy of education from being a beginning teacher to now is that now I put much more of a premium on student's ownership of the learning. It's so evident that in today's world that we haven't come to terms with what we should teach. We are still working on standards, tests, everything is test driven. ... And with the rapid change in technology and knowledge, trying to keep up with what should be taught and what should be set aside is almost impossible. But I believe that the students' ownership of learning is something that we still have a lot of room to grow on. Not like the classrooms where the teacher relies on texts books to determine what should be taught.

Kerry went on to describe student ownership this way,

My definition of [students' ownership of learning] involves students who have some choice and freedom and commencer responsibility to investigate, to discover, to explore, to analyze and synthesize [knowledge]. All the high order things in Bloom's Taxonomy that as opposed to a narrow prescribed [definition].

This definition encompasses that person who would value education more, become a self-directed learner, and maximize knowledge through self-exploration, study, or research. This person would use knowledge to analyze, classify, synthesize, and evaluate information or concepts successfully for personal growth and in pursuit of other goals. In addition, this person would embrace continued learning.

In regard to developing the qualities of student's ownership of learning that would build on student's self-direction, Jessie acknowledged that students' projects, which were practiced by many teachers at Oak High School, enabled students to learn more by themselves in addition to what the teachers were teaching. That sounded like some ownership of students' learning. However, thinking of these projects more critically, it can be deduced that the more teachers were accorded autonomy to determine how best to teach their students, how best to test them



while meeting the standards, how best to integrate a curriculum and school projects that enabled students to explore, analyze, classify information, evaluate, synthesize and use all of the cognitive abilities in Bloom's Taxonomy, the more teachers searched for best teaching solutions. Similarly, the more teachers collaborated with each other within departments and across departments and the more they shared those ideas they were finding, the more they improved their teaching strategies. Further, the more teachers solved student' learning problems and supported each other mentally, physically, and emotionally, the more they sharpened their professional skills in order to make education more interesting, relevant, and applicable for students. As mentioned, Jessie spoke about using projects. Students' projects can be used to support many cognitive abilities for students. They can also be used to support differentiated instructional methods that would enrich the learning of students. This is what Jessie said,

Well, this school in particular seems to really emphasize students working on projects. Like we'll have big projects that [students] will do throughout the quarter and then [students will] present their results at the end. That wasn't something I had ever done before, but I started doing it when I came [to this school] because it's what everybody was doing. Students seem to like these projects. I feel students find them interesting, so they motivate them [to learn]. They help them gain so much [knowledge]. [It's] like they are still learning just as much as when I would say they are going to take a test on it. They still get the test. ...But I think the projects ... become really engaging for them [students]. In math, I have done some projects where students have done research on Internet then compiled all the data and analyzed it. ... You know, these are enrichment projects. [For example] when you really don't have time to complete a lesson, you can put it in a project so that [students] can work on it.

Similarly, Kim, whose class was engaged in researching about antibiotics, applied multiple teaching and testing styles that provided opportunities for students to gain ownership of learning and increase their self-confidence. This is how Kim explained it,

In my proctor department, we are doing real world research right now. I was asked if I knew of antibiotic in graduate school. [So] we began isolating up a plant, those that are in Japan, and we are working on it now. We are doing real world research in biology II [in

which we are] trying to develop a new antibiotic. And that's something that we are probably the only school in the world. As far as I know the next level of biological research is something you'd not normally get to do until [you get to] graduate school.

When Kim was asked if the kids were getting excited about the way science was being taught.

Kim replied, "Yes, and luckily most of them are college bound. Most of them want to be doctors or molecular biologist, so this is very good for them." Kim went on to explain how the class was using multiple learning strategies and the need for support from the principal to achieve these goals. Kim also explained the importance of teaching what was meaningful to students to avoid teaching to the test. This is what Kim said,

Of course we still have great support from the principal, who backs [me up] 100%. So faculty support is a big deal, particularly in my subject. It sounds sort of weird, but I need the country. It's hard to teach biology on easel. Here I have to have the board in the classroom, but I also [need] to go to the creek [and] go to the woods. In sciences, [my students] need to get outside where life exists. [Therefore, the principal] support is very important. [Going out also] gets the kids out of the books. Anything that gets the kids out of the book will keep their attention much longer.

Because of this statement, Kim was asked if other teachers were pushing students to use books more. Kim replied,

They are not pushing the books; they are pushing the test, the Gateway exam. I catch myself teaching to the test sometimes instead of teaching to the standards. What I mean is that I catch myself teaching solely to get through the exam and that's not right. It will tie your hands. Tests should help provide the goals, [how well one was adhering to the goals].

Kim's definition and explanation about 'teaching to the test' was an indication about how students could be denied opportunities to develop self-directed ownership of their learning.

Unfortunately, the idea of teaching to the test develops from fear of teachers losing their jobs.

Unfortunately too, this factor is caused by government policies that often penalize teachers for

failing to meet standards, without providing adequate support for both teachers and students.

These factors have already been discussed.

Like Kim, Devin was not interested in taking the short cut that simply got students through the test. Rather Devin focused on building critical thinkers that would allow students to become future problem-solvers. Devin maintained that well comprehended piece of information was more applicable to students' need, and that it last longer in the memory than memorized facts. Therefore, Devin tried to support students' ownership of their learning by incorporating a teaching style that enhanced their comprehension. This is what Devin said,

I really feel like too many times students are taught algorithms and formulas and rote processes. They are asked to memorize [many] processes and to memorize algorithms. They are taught that these will get [them] through. [But] without the conceptual understanding of the underpinnings of the process, that will not benefit. And so my goal as a math teacher is to instill in students the understandings behind the process, not just memorize the process. My students will tell you that I want to limit memorization as much as possible and maximize comprehension. ... I want them to be critical thinkers; I want them to see a problem that requires multiple steps, and not to have to be guided through the process, holding their hand. I want [my students] to be able to figure the steps out by themselves.

Dylan also emphasized the need for making education more practical and more relevant for students. Practical or relevant education supported students' ownership of their learning. This is what Dylan said,

Education should motivate students by making it practical so that students don't just get to college without knowing what they need to do with their life. That's why most students just end up doing what their parents' did because education does not offer practical ways of using it.

Sandy and several other teachers indicated students needed to be offered a more diverse program, not just the academics, so that they may have other alternatives to choose from. Sandy, who was a teacher at Oak High School said, "An ideal school climate would be one that

incorporated both academics and arts so that all students could find their niche”. Consequently, Kim, Jessie, Devin, and Carmen all acknowledged that the instructional method a teacher employed played a role in either supporting students’ ownership of their learning or in inhibiting it. Carmen’s program, ‘We the People Program’, promoted several higher order cognitive abilities in students and was reported to enable students do well in the standardized tests. Carmen's students worked on many research projects as well. Carmen was instrumental in supporting the adoption of collaborative activities not just at the high school level but also at the middle schools. The benefits of teachers’ collaborative activities on students have already been discussed. This is what Carmen said,

[An ideal school climate] is one where everybody shares their ideas and is really open in what one is doing and is willing to share with everybody else. Then we’ll strike with what the kids need to know and why they need to know it.

Carmen also said this about teachers working in collaboration,

Now with our social program which I am chair, every time we find something good that correlates to the standards and works well for the kids we always share with each other. As a matter of fact we share with everybody who teaches high school history in our county. In fact yesterday, I just got back from a meeting in which I presented to the sixth grade throughout the entire county to try and implement this [collaboration] cross grade level, not just at the high school level. [So] now they are beginning to do the same thing we’ve been doing for six years. ... We are trying to get everyone to work together, you know, lots of mind connect for good ideas.

Carmen’s comment, “Lots of minds connect for good ideas,” is significant because it emphasizes why collaboration is crucial factor in the school culture. The examples presented above were just a few drawn from teachers’ comments about how they were trying to build students’ ownership of their learning. Of course, this does not imply that other teachers were not using wonderful strategies; it simply meant these were just a few from those who decided to respond to some of the interview questions in a manner that provided these insights.

Other important factors that came up and that continuously challenged students to sustain high performance as well as supporting students' ownership of learning included such programs as the Advanced Program (AP) classes, the International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, and the accelerated learners. These programs had the potential of helping students prioritize their time, set meaningful goals, monitor their progress, become self-directed learners, and improve their efficacy beliefs about their ability to succeed under pressure. They helped students learn to step up to class challenges and improve their critical thinking skills. Students learned how to evaluate and analyze new information on their own; they investigated, explored, and synthesized knowledge to make it applicable. All these helped to strengthen the self-efficacy belief about students' potential to become successful, which translated to belief that they could also succeed in colleges and universities. Kerry emphasized the benefits of IB programs to regular students this way,

We are in the process right now of securing approval to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. We have already submitted our application, we've had visiting review team here last fall, and we are currently waiting for approval. If that happens as we think it will, next year our juniors will have the option of entering the IB diploma program. ... Of course this program is not designed for every student but we think that it will fill a real need here at the Maple High School. For years we've had AP classes, and we've had honors classes as well. The IB program is designed more for not necessarily the intellectually gifted student but that strong, solid, maybe B student, who has good work ethics, is well rounded, and has good time management skills or can develop them. And with the IB diploma there are lots of very fine colleges and universities, that [says] that's an automatic ticket for admission.

Sam, a teacher at Maple High School, said this about the IB program,

Next year we are going to start the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum and I am going to be the biology teacher in that program. I think this is an opportunity for students in our little city. Even though we're city, and we have the airport and we have the university, I think our little city is sort of isolated from the rest of the country and from the rest of the world. I think some of the students that come into this school think that what happens in the world happens in [our city]. So I think the emphasis from the

community to develop an IB is a really good thing. ... That is the best thing that has happened since I have been in this school... There will be students who will learn to think globally and think internationally. And if we are going to compete with other countries, we need to understand other cultures. I think this is one of the ways we can do that.

What Sam was emphasizing was students need to be taught to think globally. This viewpoint is in agreement with the goals of student ownership of learning. When students think globally, they learn to find ways to solve global problems. Sam went on to say this about the IB class,

One of the things I want to do is I want to hook my students up by the Internet with students in other countries. [This] is something I have done in the past with countries like Canada. [Students can] share data, whether data about global warming, data about environmental problems in their countries, or about endangered species.

Of course, even though the AP and the IB programs are good for students, they may still leave out many students. This is where technology becomes a great enhancer for students' learning and, therefore, a great support for students' ownership of their learning. Technology was reported to make learning more interesting for students. Students could teach others through class presentation, they could use virtual learning, do simulations of objects, and do research of various subjects. Technology was, therefore, a great enhancer for students' learning, especially when it was used well. Jessie explained how the use of technology sometimes helped to enhance the teaching of geometrical concepts. This is what Jessie said,

Technology can enhance learning if it's used correctly You know, sometimes if you are using the PowerPoint just for the sake of using it, it can [be] distracting, [especially when] there is so much to look at. But I think if it's done right, it can make [things] more clear for students. Let me give you an example, there is a software called Geometer Sketch Pad, which allows you to make geometric shapes. [With this software] you can click on the vertex [of a geometric shape] and drag it to change the shape of, for example, the triangle. [But then] up in the corner you can watch how when you drag the vertex [to different positions] what happens to the area. Well, it stays the same. So you can do that to teach that the area stays the same. And you know there are just so many [other] movements you can do to teach different concepts. ... [So] you can illustrate, "Look it's still the same triangle we are just moving everything around. So in that way I think

technology can make the ideas more clear because it's kind of happening in front of the [students].

Shannon talked about being able to present lessons with smart board without losing track.

Well it depends [the use of technology]. For example, the use of calculators, [has been] a blessing, but it is also a draw back because students don't seem to know how to calculate without them. ... [On the other hand], I have a smart board, which I have had for four months now. And it has helped me to organize my thoughts. It is easy to get through [my] presentation without getting lost when I am interrupted by students.

Logan, who had connected a computer in class to work like a smart board because the class did not have one, explained the benefits of using technology to enhance students' instruction.

Logan's use of technology supported students' ownership of their learning and strengthened their self-efficacy beliefs. Logan gave these examples about how students use technology in the class,

If I was going to assign a student to do a presentation on a mathematician and his or her accomplishment, or if I was going to assign a student to take a section of the book and do a review lesson for me right before a test ... [I would be helping the student to review]. I think that you learn best when you teach others. So I like my students to teach the class every once in a while; teach a small section, teach a review section, or review it and explain it. Well, if they had their own computers, they would sit down and put together a more polished PowerPoint presentation.

Alex also added another important factor that supported students' ownership of learning, learning to prioritize time. Alex maintained that helping students prioritize their time would enable them to perform well in colleges and universities. In other words, it would support college-going skills in students. Helping students prioritize their time was also one of the goals for the AP, the IB, and the honors' roll programs. Alex said,

As a school, one of the things we probably [need to] teach kids is that there are options out there for them. You start talking to them about here is where you can go as far as if you decide on a career. [We tell them] that college is accessible, both financially as well as availability. We teach them how to become organized because that is one of the things that really becomes a roadblock for most kids. Kids think they are not good at school. But it's not school [that] they are not good at, it's [that they are] not good at organizational skills. So then they start falling behind academically because they don't know how to

prioritize their time. But once they learn [how] to prioritize their time, they start doing well academically in school. Then, they begin to realize that college is a possibility. But if you are already failing high school, what makes you think you can go to college and succeed?

Jackie, the assistant principal at the Cherry High School, emphasized the need for making schools more diverse in order to teach youngsters to become more tolerant of others. If students were to be entrusted with showing better leadership abilities, then working together and learning to cooperate with others needed to be reinforced early. Therefore, exposing students to diverse races and cultures would enable them to appreciate and celebrate diversity. This knowledge would enable them to become more rounded. Further, exposing students to diversity would enable them to become more critical of their own judgment about others. This is what Jackie said,

Well, I would personally like to see a more evenly mixed student population, more diversity. This area is not the most racially diverse as you can see. We have few kids that come in from the outside, and it's challenging for some of them. ...The stereo type of some kids here is very challenging. I have noticed that some don't know how to deal with people of other races; and that is an issue. [As leaders] we jump [in our discussions] on one thing one night; [then] we are here the next moment, and it's challenging, I don't think we do enough to determine what we want. [But] we have some Hispanics kids here; we have Blacks, and the mixture. And that's the kind of education that I miss. It's not that I don't have some; I just don't have enough [for the type of diversity I desire]. ... So I think an ideal culture would be more diverse and tolerant.

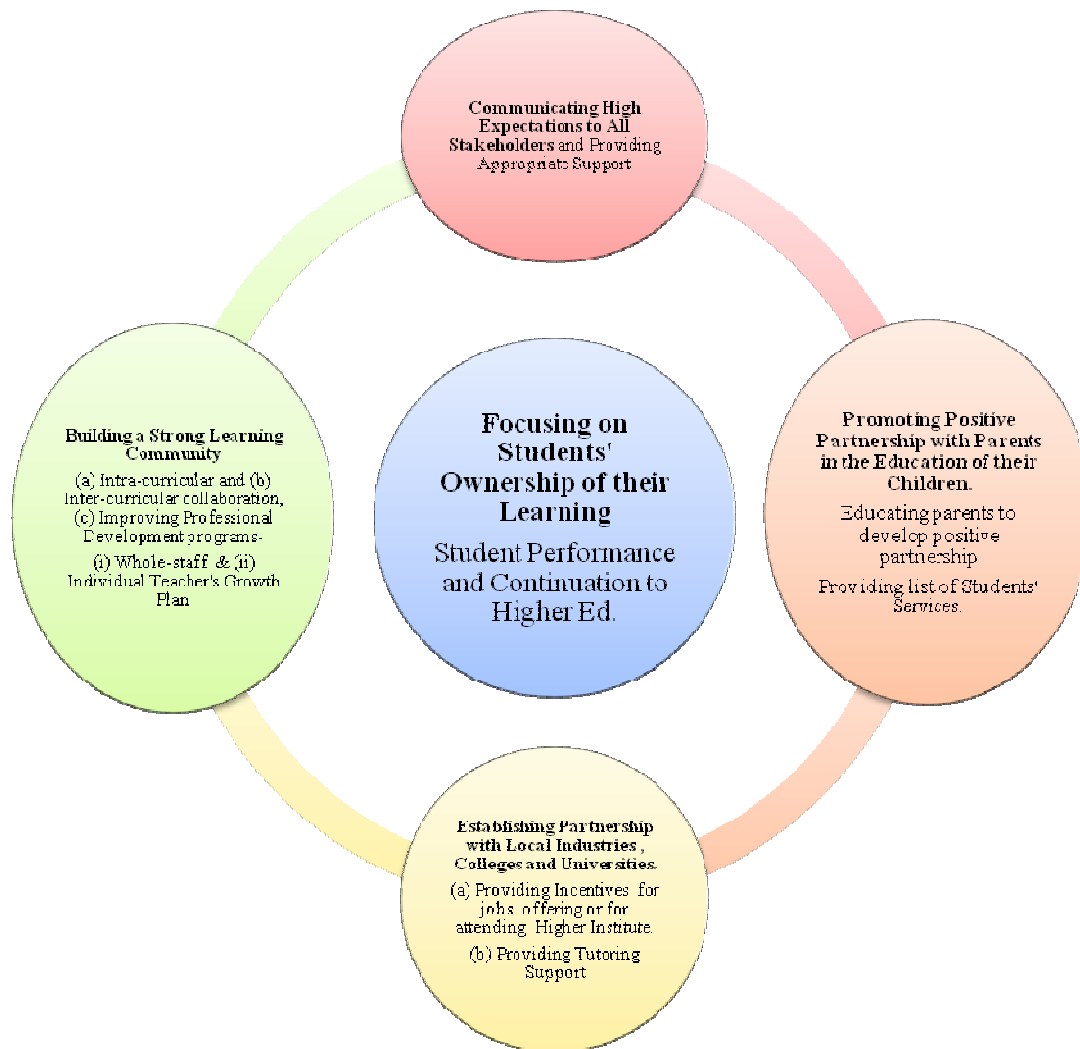
Finally, in relation to the purpose of this study which was to explore the characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rate, Pat made a significant observation, "Generally, students whose parents were actively involved in their education performed better and were more likely to continue with higher education."

In summary, the term students' ownership of learning was used to exemplify the nurturing processes that would be essential in school culture to develop self-efficacy beliefs



about students' ability to succeed on their own. The ultimate goals for building students' ownership of learning would, therefore, be to improve students' confidences about their potential to succeed, including the potential to succeed in postsecondary education. Therefore, the more schools offered instructions that centered on students' ownership of learning, the more they invited students to embark on challenging projects while providing appropriate support, and the more students strove to step up to various academic challenges, the more self-assured they became of their abilities. However, it would take a concerted effort to build a culture that would sustain a steady progress of improving college-going rates.

The intent of study was to develop a grounded theory for explaining the characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee. The goal was to develop theoretical framework for explaining the characteristics of such school culture. Figure 1, on page 145 shows a graphical representation of the interrelationships of the characteristics that were identified in this study.



*Figure 1.* Graph representing theoretical framework: The characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rate for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee. The goal was to develop a grounded theory for explaining the characteristics of school culture as defined by high school teachers and principals in the region. The overarching question addressed in the study was: What were the characteristics of school cultures that became effective in supporting high school student college-going rate? To answer this question, the process of building a grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was used. A qualitative study was preferred for this study because of its ability to provide thick, descriptive information for explaining important cultural elements. Further, the process of generating a qualitative grounded theory was better suited for studying cultural phenomena for which this study was aimed. Figure 1, on page 145 shows the graphical representation of the interrelationships of the characteristics that were identified in this study.

#### *Findings*

The study identified five fundamental characteristics essential in successful school cultures and that held the highest potential for influencing the college-going rates. These five fundamental characteristics were (a) communicating high expectation to all stakeholders, (b) building a strong learning community, (c) promoting positive partnership with parents, (d) establishing partnership with local industries, colleges, and universities, and (e) focusing on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education. All five characteristics held the potential for supporting a strong school culture

by which students' performance, achievement, and efficacious beliefs about their potential to continue in higher education could be achieved.

This study indicated that communicating high expectations to all stakeholders was the antecedent for an effective school culture. The study indicated the school administrator as the most important for setting the tone for high expectations to all stakeholders. Leaders set the school culture by the manner in which they provided support for stakeholders, by the manner in which they required accountability from all stakeholders, and by the manner they helped to increase coherence. Previous studies such as those completed by Fullan (2001), Newmann and Associates (1999), Owens (2001), and Renchler (1992) support the finding that school principals play the major role in establishing a school culture that supported student learning and success.

In regard to setting the tone for high expectations, the study indicated that high expectations needed to be combined with support for stakeholders, especially for teachers and students, in order to maximize their potential to enhance the set goals. Support for stakeholders could be in the form of allowing teachers autonomy to share ideas, material resources for teachers, support for teachers' developmental programs, tutoring support for students, and offering counseling support for parents that would also ensure promotion of positive parental partnership with schools in the education of their children. In addition, high expectation needed to incorporate appreciation for teachers' hard work.

The study also indicated communicating high expectations to stakeholders required accentuating accountability of all stakeholders. Therefore, treating teachers as professionals, empowering them to participate in various school decisions making including determining professional development programs that would best suit whole-staff or individual teacher's

needs, and allowing them time to collaborate all implied teachers would be held accountable. Similarly, supporting parents with counseling and supporting students with the after-school tutoring all necessitated holding each group accountable.

The study also indicated communicating high expectations to stakeholders required helping make coherence. Making coherence required providing a general understanding about what was going on and the reasoning behind different practices. It required showing the congruency between a school's activities and its ultimate goal or vision and showing consistency of the values being upheld. Coherence making helped provide the rationale behind the many activities that teachers were required to participate in outside their realm of class load. Incorporating stakeholders into the overarching vision helped them develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the organization. Similarly, involving faculty in decision making helped to increase their understanding of the nature of school needs. It also reduced faculty frustrations that were associated with low teacher morale.

The study also indicated that there was a need to build a strong learning community. Senge (1990), Fullan (2001), and Deming (2000) were the best advocates for learning organizations. This study revealed that knowledge needed to be established in those areas that made the most impact on the students' learning. Therefore, in order for secondary schools to become effective in supporting students' performance, in reducing students' dropout rate, and in order for schools to influence college-going rates, a strong community of learners needed to be established. The study indicated that the body of community of learners needed to emphasize knowledge base in three important areas: (1) knowledge supporting growth for the corporate faculty, (2) knowledge supporting growth and orientation for new teachers, and (3) knowledge

supporting positive partnership with parents in the education of their children. The study revealed that building knowledge for the corporate faculty was best achieved in three ways; (a) by promoting collaboration within departments, which was also referred to as the intracurricular support because it supported teachers' growth within subjects. New teachers were also best supported through the intracurricular support. (b) Knowledge was also built through teachers' collaboration across departments or intercurricula support. Intercurricular support was especially very beneficial to students as it helped them to learn to synthesize knowledge for future use. (c) Knowledge also grew through improved professional development programs, some of which were already in place. Effective professional development programs needed to emphasize two separate areas (i) the whole-staff developmental programs and (ii) individual teacher's growth plan or the personal growth plan.

As indicated, all the five characteristics identified in this study focused on students' ownership of their learning. In other words, they held the potential for supporting a strong school culture that would enhance students' performance, achievement, and efficacious beliefs about their potential to continue in higher education. The goal of establishing a learning community would, therefore, primarily be to strengthen students' ownership of their learning. Through this, students' confidences about their potential to succeed, including their potential to succeed in colleges and universities, would be enhanced. The study indicated that improved teacher skills would translate to students' benefits through improved teaching strategies. Similarly, improved parental support had a direct impact on students' learning and continuation to higher education.

By integrating intracurricular support or collaboration within departments, teachers improved skills through gaining from others' knowledge and experience. Groups evaluated their

teaching strategies and sometimes reinvented better teaching strategies. They critiqued the test results together, and they used data to strengthen their weak areas. As mentioned, collaboration within the departments was reported to support new teachers better than the mentor-mentee programs. The study also indicated that schools needed to establish intercurricular support or collaboration across departments. Intercurricular support was especially beneficial to students as it enabled them to learn to synthesize knowledge. It also made learning interesting and relevant for them. The study also indicated that schools needed to improve their professional development programs. Although whole-staff professional development programs helped to support whole-group needs, many teachers were actually looking for professional development that would support their individual growth. Lastly, the study indicated that it would be worth borrowing ideas from the GEAR UP program and investing on their adoption. The GEAR UP program was a school outreach program that was generating a great impact on both the students' behavior and parental involvement. Obviously, improved student behavior translated to improved student performance, achievement, and consequently greater potential for impacting college-going rates.

In terms of promoting positive partnership with parents, the study indicated that parental behavior in relationship to schools was modified by certain factors. Previous studies on parental involvement, such as that done by Mapp and Henderson (2002), indicated that the more educated the parents were the more they participated in the education of their children. The study by Mapp and Henderson also indicated that parental involvement in the education of their children improved students' behavior and performance. Deal and Peterson (1999) acknowledged that, "only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish" (p.132).

This study indicated that parental involvement in secondary education was critical to the success of students. Parental involvement in the education of their children played a major role in improving the attendance rate, it improved students' attitude towards school, it reduced the dropout rate, and it improved students' performance. All these factors, in turn, helped improve students' college-going rates. This study revealed that these results were especially significant in those schools where parental participation in the education of their children was mandatory. As mentioned, the study found that parents' behavior in their relationship with schools was modified by certain factors. These factors, denoted as parental behavioral patterns, could be categorized in five ways. They were: (1) parental involvement based on school policies to participate; (2) parental involvement based on the education of parents; (3) parental involvement based on a student's performance; (4) parental involvement based on the age of the student; and, (5) parental involvement based on the school outreach programs. Although all the findings about these behavioral patterns came as a coincidence, they reveal the importance of emphasizing parental support in the education of the children. In fact, the study revealed that parents became more involved when there were school policies demanding their participation. Further, the study revealed that the more involved parents were in the school, the better the students performed and the more likely they embarked on higher education.

The study also indicated that even though there has been an increase of parental involvement based on increased communication technologies such as Internet technologies and cell phones, many teachers and principals did not want parents to neglect the parent-teacher conferences. That study indicated that, in general, many parents, including those who were educated, relaxed their participation in schools when schools stopped demanding their



participation. However, in those schools where parental involvement was imposed, parents stayed involved until their children graduated from high school, which added great benefit to their children. The study indicated that parents of students who were not performing well participated less in the education of their children than those who were performing well. Lastly, the study indicated that parental involvement based on the school outreach programs, such as the GEAR UP program or the Jump Start, improved parental participation greatly. These programs, especially the GEAR UP program, were reported to have a great impact on the parents' participation and students' behavior, including improved student interest in school and increased student interest in college admission and requirement.

On the whole, however, the study seemed to indicate that schools that supported parental involvement experienced greater success in terms of students' performance, behavior, higher attendance rate, reduced dropout rate, and, consequently, higher college-going rate. In general, parental involvement in the education of their children was so critical that it played a major role in the way students behaved, performed at school, and in the choices they made to continue with higher education. The study indicated that educating parents to develop positive partnership with schools by use of borrowed ideas from the GEAR UP program would be of paramount importance. Providing counseling support to educate parents how to become actively involved in the education of their children and how to engage in positive relationship with schools would also go hand in hand with the ideas of a learning community in the school.

This study also indicated that schools needed to establish partnership with local industries, colleges, and universities. Partnership with local industries or institutes of higher education enabled them to send a representative to high schools during Career Day. The study

indicated that partnership with these groups played major role in providing students with incentives to continue with higher education. For example, some industries offered jobs to students who completed high school and attended at least 2 years of college. Local colleges and universities offered incentives in the form of scholarships and grants. Because most of the incentives stipulated the need for students to complete high school and join a 2- or 4-year college, schools that were forming partnerships with these bodies were therefore influencing college-going rates for their students. Many high school students were reported to strive hard to stay in school and attend a 2- or 4-year college. However, colleges and universities could also support high schools by offering teachers courses that met the schools' needs or by offering and facilitating professional development workshops. They could also support high schools by offering some after school tutoring through graduate assistantships.

Lastly, this study indicated that successful school cultures needed to focus on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education. A study completed by Greene and Forster (2003) indicated that students who failed to plan for college were less likely to gain full access to the country's economic and social opportunities. Therefore, successful school cultures needed to emphasize the importance of continuing with higher education to all stakeholders in order for all stakeholders to join in a concerted effort to support students' continuation to higher education. This, of course, does not imply mandating that all students take the college path, although many of the vocational programs are also now available at colleges and universities. But it simply means teaching the students the benefits of continuing with higher education for their future well being.

The term students' ownership of learning was used to denote each student's intellectual growth towards that person who would value education, become a self-directed learner, seek to maximize knowledge through self-directed investigation or exploration, be able to analyze, classify, synthesize, and evaluate information or concepts successfully, and embrace continued learning. Therefore, the manner in which a school culture would incorporate instructional strategies that enhanced these qualities in their student body mattered. The ultimate goals for building student's ownership of learning would be to nurture efficacy beliefs about students' potential to become a successful human. Bandura (1993, 1997) referred to self-efficacy as a person's judgment to organize and carry out the plan of action necessary to achieve a certain level of performance successfully. Therefore, in order to improve student college-going rates, schools with successful cultures needed to nurture self-efficacy beliefs in their students. The more schools emphasized high expectations and combined these with student's support, the more students strove to step up to the challenge, and the more self-assured students became of their ability to succeed, even in colleges and universities.

The process of building students' confidences also required creating a concerted support for students through forming partnership with parents and establishing support from the community, local industries, colleges, and universities. Therefore, this process required establishing a school culture with the five characteristics that were identified at the beginning of this chapter.

### *Conclusions*

As mentioned, this study identified five characteristics of school culture with the highest potential for influencing the college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast

Tennessee. These five characteristics were: (a) communicating high expectation to all stakeholders, (b) building a strong learning community, (c) promoting positive partnership with parents, (d) establishing partnership with local industries, colleges, and universities, and (e) focusing their effort and activities on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education. All these five characteristics held the potential for supporting a strong school culture by which students' performance, achievement, and efficacious beliefs about their potential to continue with higher education would be realized.

The study indicated that communicating high expectations to all stakeholders was the antecedent for an effective school culture and that school leaders were the most responsible for influencing school culture through their way of setting the tone for high expectations to all stakeholders, providing the support needed to stakeholders, requiring stakeholder accountability, and helping make coherence.

The study indicated that the body of community of learners needed to emphasize knowledge in areas that made the most impact on students learning. These were: (1) knowledge supporting growth for the corporate faculty, (2) knowledge supporting the growth and orientation of new teachers, and (3) knowledge supporting promotion for a positive partnership with parents. The study concluded that: (a). Collaboration within departments to enabled teachers' growth within subject areas; that (b) collaboration across departments enabled students to find learning as relevant and interesting; and (c) that the professional development programs, both whole-staff and individual teacher's growth plan, needed to be improved in order to support teachers growth and school improvement plans most effectively.

The study indicated that parental involvement in the education of their children was crucial to their success in many ways. Therefore, educating parents to develop positive partnership with schools by use of borrowed ideas from the GEAR UP program would be very advantageous to schools. In fact, educating parents to form positive partnership with schools would be essential if the parents want their children to excel at school. The study also indicated that successful school cultures needed to focus on students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education. Further, the manner in which classes were taught in order to support student's ownership of learning mattered.

#### *Recommendations*

1. Given the findings of this study and the importance of developing strong school cultures that support students' ownership of their learning, students' performance, and students' continuation to higher education, the researcher would recommend that further investigation about school culture using a quantitative study be done.
2. This study indicated that there is great need for schools to build a learning community. Therefore, a continuation of this study to investigate how such a learning community could best be developed would be recommended. A continuation of this could be done using either in a qualitative or quantitative method.
3. As can be expected, enhancing the goals of a learning community would require funding. Therefore, government support for schools in this area would be recommended.
4. Because the study indicated that teachers and principals are the most knowledgeable and the closest to student to be able to analyze each student's needs and the needs of the school as a whole, the researcher would recommend that the state and the local

government relinquish some control and empower teachers and principals to engage in the site-based decision making for the betterment of a school. Therefore, instead of decisions being passed down to schools, ideas could be generated at the school level using teachers' and principals' input. This way schools could critically analyze their school need, as well as those of their students, and come up with the best solutions.

5. In addition, instead of the national government and state setting standards for schools, each school system could pick a few teachers to participate in creating standards to be adopted by schools within the state. It would be important that teachers' selection represent the different students' aptitude; from high achieving to average students and the underachieving. A new group would be recommended after 2-3 years.
6. The state and national government could play another vital role of supporting and facilitating teachers' exchange of ideas, both statewide and nationwide. This could be achieved through funding schools to support within school research, to support collaborative activities within schools, to help sponsor teachers and principals to attend conferences, and to support schools to prepare their own presentations to others.
7. The national and state government could also increase support for high school students by funding either college student workers or graduate assistants that would be willing to offer after-school tutoring to high school students.
8. High school students support could also be increased through job related support at the high school, to help support high school students who are working long hours after school.

### *Technologies*

Many teachers emphasized that some instructional technologies helped them to enhance the presentation of lessons. The use of smart board was especially credited for making teaching more efficient for teachers. Teachers could save their notes, they could quickly add in other examples other than those in texts, they could incorporate virtual learning, or do some simulation of the objects they were teaching, and they could save notes for students who were absent. All these make instructional technology a useful tool for enhancing students' learning. However, many teachers also emphasized that technology should only be used as a tool for enhancing learning otherwise it could become flashy and distract students.

### *Suggestions*

#### *Tapping into Professionals Input For Decision Making*

One other aspect that was not being applied by many schools and that would be recommended was the way faculty's input into decision making could be implemented. As was noted, many teachers were getting very upset with the professional development being offered because their input was not sought. As mentioned, encouraging teachers' suggestions would be one way schools could enhance site-based decision making. Although Oak High School had formed committees for this purpose, teachers' contributions were not benefitting the school because of the way committees had been structured. Including parents in the committee probably exacerbated some problems. Although parents could be included in other committees requiring whole-school decisions, decisions relating to everyday projects and programs would be better left to teachers, they are the experts. Pat was right about need for a professional development that would enhance teamwork among teachers.

The school could create a system by which teachers could make suggestions that could be used towards school improvement plans or whole-staff professional development. These would be suggestions that could be debated in staff meetings. To make suggestions formal a school could request that a suggestion follow some stipulated formats. For example, suggestions could be typed, highlight a need or problem, show an alternative way to solve the problem, and provide the rationale or the benefits for solving it that way. Further, the suggestion could highlight the negative impact it would have, if any, on the students' learning or on the general school. Putting suggestions in writing would imply a teacher cared enough for the idea to put it in writing. Therefore, those teachers not willing to bring their suggestion into limelight would not be expected to complain. However, debating or even mentioning teachers' ideas could go a long way into satisfying teachers like Pat or Dylan.

#### *Personal Comments*

I would like to emphasize two important comments. One was acknowledged by Deal and Peterson (1999), "only when a solid and positive partnership prevails between schools and parents will education flourish" (p.132). The other one is that it will take a concerted effort to build a strong school culture that supports students' ownership of learning, student achievement, and student continuation to higher education.



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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Sample for the School Principals

#### I. Introduction

- A. Thank the participant and explain the intent and purpose of study: The intent of this study is to generate a grounded theory for explaining what constitutes an effective school culture for supporting students' continuation into colleges and universities. The significance of this would be to provide a framework for explaining the characteristics of effective school cultures that could be used by high school principals and school districts to support students' achievement and their continuation to higher education. I will use your words to develop the theoretical framework and may quote you in my final report. However, I assure you that your participation in this study will remain anonymous. I will not use your name in association with your quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that might link you to your words in the publication. During the interview, I will stop to ask if you still want to continue or withdraw without penalty, and if not, will proceed with the interview. This session should take us approximately 45 minutes.
- B. Signing the Informed Consent Form – (go through the informed consent form explaining the procedure of the interview and the rights of volunteering participants). Ask if he or she has any questions. If no questions, ask him or her to sign the informed consent form and give him or her copy of the signed form.
- C. To ensure accuracy while reporting your comments, I would like your permission to record our conversation. I will also be making memo notes in the course of the interview. Do I have your permission? Do you have any questions before I turn-on the recorder? (If none, turn on the recorder).

#### II. Main Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a principal in this school?  
(Personal values)
2. Please tell me why you became a school principal? (Ask probing questions as need be).
3. What was your philosophy of education when you began and how has that changed, if it has, since you began? (If it has changed, what accounted for the change?) Based on what you have told me about why you became a teacher and about your educational philosophy, it seems you value \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ very much. Is that correct?  
(School values)
4. How would you describe your vision for this school?
5. Since you began working as a school principal, what major projects/events have you initiated? (You may recount as many events as you can).
6. What was the significance of those initiatives or what meaning did you hope to convey? Do you think the message you tried to convey was well understood? Why or why not?

7. What are the major obstacles that you believe principals like yourself and those in other schools face today? In your opinion, what are some of the ways these problems could be solved?
  8. In your opinion, what would be an ideal school climate?
  9. Please complete this sentence. If I had the money and support from the school board, I would \_\_\_\_\_. Please explain why those factors would be important?
  10. Use of technology for classroom instruction varies with schools and possibly with school funding. How much of the classroom technology would you suggest is used in your school? Would you support more use of technology in classroom instruction or less? Why or why not?
  11. What is your opinion about professional development and how does your school foster professional development, if it does?
  12. Some principals believe teachers work harder if left to work independently in their own classrooms. Others believe teacher's collaborative activities, such as team work, and collegial support create a better teaching/learning environment. Where do you stand in regard to these opposing viewpoints and why?
  13. Research shows that many new teachers leave the teaching profession after the first year. In your opinion, what would be the best process for supporting new teachers' stay?
  14. What are some of the ways students are rewarded or become encouraged to work hard in your school?
  15. In what ways does your school ensure support for your students' high learning expectation? Are these support school wide or just within the classrooms?
  16. What are some of the ways that parents become involved in the learning of their children? Have these practices been effective? If not, what others ways would you suggest would make parents more involved in the learning of their children?
  17. Do you think schools can be effective in supporting the college-going rates? If so, in what ways do you see them as becoming effective or ineffective?
- (Sharing decision making)
18. Some people say that teachers should be involved in decision-making regarding all manner of teaching professionalism. Would you say this is a good idea or not? Why or why not? If it is a good idea how could teachers be fully involved in the decision-making regarding all professional matters?

## Conclusion

Based on the information you have given me, I would summarize your comments in this manner. ... Is my summary correct? Please remember that I plan to write my dissertation based on research findings of your beliefs about what constitutes a successful school culture that supports college-going rates for high school students. Is there anything you would want to emphasize in this research? ... That concludes our session. Do you have any additional comments before I stop the tape-recorder? (Turn-off the tape recorder) - Do you have any additional comments off the record? Thank you for your participation in this study.

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Sample for the Teachers

#### Introduction

A. Thank the participant and explain the intent and purpose of study: The intent of this study is to generate a grounded theory for explaining what constitutes an effective school culture for supporting students' continuation into colleges and universities. The significance of this would be to provide a framework for explaining the characteristics of effective school cultures that could be used by high school principals and school districts to support students' achievement and their continuation to higher education. I will use your words to develop the theoretical framework and may quote you in my final report. However, I assure you that your participation in this study will remain anonymous. I will not use your name in association with your quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that might link you to your words in the publication. During the interview, I will stop to ask if you still want to continue or withdraw without penalty, and if not, will proceed with the interview. This session should take us approximately 45 minutes.

- A. Signing the Informed Consent Form – (go through the informed consent form explaining the procedure of the interview and the rights of volunteering participants. Ask if he or she has any questions. If no questions, ask him or her to sign the informed consent form and give him or her copy of the signed form)
- B. To ensure accuracy while reporting your comments, I would like your permission to record our conversation. I will also be making memo notes in the course of the interview. Do I have your permission? Do you have any questions before I turn-on the recorder? (If none, turn on the recorder).

#### II. Main Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching in this school?

(Personal values)

2. Please tell me why you became a teacher? (Ask probing questions as need be).
3. What was your philosophy of education when you began teaching and how has that changed, if it has, since you began teaching? (If it changed, what accounted to the change?) Based on what you have told me about why you became a teacher and about your educational philosophy, it seems you value \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ very much. Is that correct?

(School values)

4. Since you began working as a teacher, what major educational events have you seen happen in this school? (You may recount as many events as you can).
5. Why do you think each of those events became significant or what meaning did you feel they conveyed?
6. You mentioned you value \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Are there specific school policies, or practices that help support those values? Please explain. (If there are none) how would the school go about integrating those values so that your teaching values may be incorporated?

7. In your opinion, what would be an ideal school climate?
  8. Use of technology for classroom instruction varies with schools and possibly with school funding, or teachers' technical skills. How much classroom technology would you say you use in your own classroom? Would you support more use of technology in classroom instruction or less and what would it take to increase classroom technology?
  9. What is your opinion about professional development and how does your school foster professional development, if it does?
  10. What is your stand concerning teachers working together collaboratively and with high collegial support in terms of supporting students' learning? Would you say it creates better teaching/learning environment or there is really no difference? Why or why not? Would say teachers in your school prefer working independently in their own classroom or collaboratively?
  11. Research shows that many new teachers leave the teaching profession after the first year. In your opinion, how does your school support the stay of new teachers?
  12. What are some of the school wide ways that students in your school get rewarded or become encouraged to work hard?
  13. Does your school have a way of ensuring support for students' high learning expectation? Are these support school wide or just within the classrooms? What would be your suggestions for supporting school-wide support for students' high expectations?
  14. What are some of the ways that parents become involved in the learning of their children? Have these practices been effective? If not, what others ways would you suggest would make parents more involved in the learning of their children?
  15. In what ways do you think your school could support more students to continue with higher education?
  16. If you were the principal in this school, what are some of the things you would initiate to support more students continuing to higher education? Why?
- (Decision making and empowerment)
17. Some people say that teachers should be involved in decision-making regarding all manner of teaching professionalism. Would you say this is a good idea? Why or why not? If it is a good idea how could teachers be fully involved in the decision-making regarding all professional matters?

## Conclusion

Based on the information you have given me, I would summarize your comments in this manner. ... Is my summary correct? Please remember that I plan to write my dissertation based on research findings of your beliefs about what constitutes a successful school culture that supports college-going rates for high school students. Is there anything you would want to emphasize in this research? ... That concludes our session. Do you have any additional comments before I stop the tape-recorder? (Turn-off the tape recorder) - Do you have any additional comments off the record? Thank you for your participation in this study.

## APPENDIX C

### Copy of the Letter to the Principals and School Districts

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am a student at East Tennessee State working on my degree as a Doctor of Education. I am writing to request your permission to use you (the principal) and some of your faculty in my qualitative research. I would like to use a qualitative method to generate a grounded theory by exploring the perceptions of teachers and principals in regard to what constitutes an effective school culture for supporting students' college-going rates (rate of students' continuation to colleges and universities). The purpose of the study is to develop a framework for explaining the characteristics of school cultures that support students' college-going rates using a grounded theory. Findings from the study could be used to inform high school principals and school districts about ways to support students' college-going rates.

Your school and the school district have been selected for this study. As is typical of a grounded theory and in order to ensure the selection of participants who have knowledge about the research topic, the selection of participants in this study will be purposeful and not random. The purposeful selection, however, will be equitable for all potential participants that will match the sampling criteria. The purposeful criteria for this study will be: (a) variation of males and females, (b) years of service, at least 10+ years of teaching experience, and (c) location of employment, requiring high school teachers employed in Northeast Tennessee. I would therefore appreciate your permission, not just for using your faculty in this study, but also for using your faculty directory to identify potential volunteers for the study. I may also request support from the administrative staff in confirming teachers' gender and years of service. Although I will use the quotes from participating members in my final report, I assure you that your name or the names of your faculty will not be used in association with their quotes, nor will any identifiers connecting you to this study or your school be used in the data analysis or in the publication. Your participation and that of your teachers will remain anonymous. I would also want to meet with you personally to follow up this request and to answer any of the questions or concerns you might have.

Sincerely yours,

Annie Kariuki



## APPENDIX D

### Copy of the Letter to Individual Teachers

Dear Dr. Mr. Mrs.

I am a student at East Tennessee State working on my degree as a Doctor of Education.

I would appreciate your support in letting me use you in my qualitative research. I would like to use a qualitative method to generate a grounded theory by exploring the perceptions of teachers and principals in regard to what constitutes an effective school culture for supporting students' college-going rates (rate of students' continuation to colleges and universities). The purpose of the study is to develop a framework for explaining the characteristics of school cultures that support students' college-going rates using a grounded theory. Findings from the study could be used to inform high school principals and school districts about ways to support students' college-going rates.

Your school and the school district have been selected for this study. As is typical of a grounded theory and in order to ensure the selection of participants who have knowledge about the research topic, the selection of participants in this study will be purposeful and not random. The purposeful selection, however, will be equitable for all potential participants that will match the sampling criteria. The purposeful criteria for this study will be: (a) variation of males and females, (b) years of service, at least 10+ years of teaching experience, and (c) location of employment, requiring high school teachers employed in Northeast Tennessee. Although I will use your quotes in my final report, I assure you that your name will not be used in association with your quotes, nor will any identifiers connecting you or your school to this study be used in the data analysis or in the publication. Your participation and that of will remain anonymous. I would also want to meet with you personally to follow up this request and to answer any of the questions or concerns you might have.

Sincerely yours,

Annie Kariuki

APPENDIX E

Copy of the Informed Consent

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Anne M. Kariuki

TITLE OF PROJECT: The characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee

**EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to explore the characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rates of high school graduates. The information you will provide will be used for my dissertation, which is a requirement for my degree in Doctor of Education. The objective of this study is to develop and publish a theoretical framework explaining the research topic.

**DURATION:** You will participate in one (1) 45-minute personal interview with the researcher.

**PROCEDURES:** I will ask you questions regarding your perceptions about the characteristics of school culture that enhances college-going rates. In the process of the interview, I may ask some probing questions just to ensure clear understanding or accuracy of the information you will be providing. I will record our conversation and also make notes to myself in the course of the interview. I do not anticipate circumstances in which we may not complete the interview, however, you have the right to stop this interview at any time and to withdraw your data without penalty.

**ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS:** There are no alternative procedures except not to participate.

**POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study. To ensure your right to privacy, the researcher will not use your name on the audio-tape, the transcript, or the final research report. In addition, the researcher will not use any identifiable labels in the final report.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS:** The findings from this study will be used to develop a theoretical framework for explaining the characteristics of effective school culture in supporting college-going rates. I am willing to provide you with a copy of the resulting theoretical framework and research summary. You may find the framework helpful in developing an effective school culture.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling me, Anne Kariuki at (423) 542- 0428 or by sending me email at [zamk8@goldmail.etsu.edu](mailto:zamk8@goldmail.etsu.edu). You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

Ver. 01/30/08

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BY CHAIR/IRB COORDINATOR ETSU/VA IRB

Page 1 of 2

Subject Initials \_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Anne M. Kariuki

TITLE OF PROJECT: The characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rates for high school graduates in northeast Tennessee

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may contact me at (423) 542-0428, or Dr. Franklin (423) 439-7621. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the principal investigator home for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research (Anne M. Kariuki and members of my dissertation) have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

_____ SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	_____ DATE
_____ PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT	_____ DATE
_____ SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR	_____ DATE
_____ SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)	_____ DATE

APPROVED  
By THE ETSU / VAIRB  
FEB 04 2008  
BY \_\_\_\_\_  
CHAIR/IRB COORDINATOR

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FEB 03 2009  
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## VITA

ANNIE M. KARIUKI

**Personal Data:** Place of Birth: Limuru, Kenya  
Marital Status: Married

**Education:** Doctor of Education, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2008  
Concentration: Post Secondary and Private Sector.  
Master, Teaching, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2001  
Major: Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)  
Master, Engineering, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 1993  
Concentration: Manufacturing Engineering  
Bachelor in Business, Lee University, Cleveland, TN, 1990  
Major: Business Administration  
Elementary Teacher Certification, Kagumo College, Kenya, 1975

**Experience:** Doctoral Fellow, East Tennessee State University, TN, 2006-2008  
Supported research and on-line projects, including creation of on-line courses using Black Board and D2L  
Writing Center, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2006-07  
Assisted students with writing  
Teacher, Knox County School System, Knoxville, TN, 2003-2005  
Developed a math and reading curriculum for first and second grades.  
Coordinated intercultural activities and sponsored research on Black history.  
Fifth Grade Teacher: Providence Academy, Johnson City, TN, 2002-2003  
Developed an integrated curriculum for math and science for all fifth grade students  
Teacher Assistant: Elizabethton City Schools, Elizabethton, TN, 2001-2001  
Supported with record-keeping, served all elementary school counselors  
Housing Department East Tennessee State, Johnson City, TN, 1998-2000  
Supported department with book-keeping services  
Manager: Safari World and Africa & Tours, Kingsport TN, 1996-1998  
Coordinated business activities, hiring, training, purchasing, and coordinating travelers' itinerary  
Developmental Study, East Tennessee State, Johnson City, TN, 1990-1993  
Assisted students with math skills

**Research:** Investigated the characteristics of school culture that influence college-going rate for high school students in northeast Tennessee. Dissertation, East Tennessee State, Johnson City, 2008

**Honors and Awards:** Dean's List, Lee University, Awarded Academic Scholarship, 1988.