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## Academic optimism and instructional leadership in urban elementary schools

Angela M. Allen  
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**ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP  
IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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By  
Angela M. Allen  
June 2011


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IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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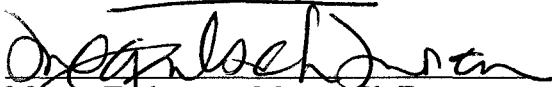
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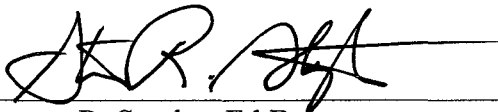
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Steven R. Staples, Ed.D.

## DEDICATION

“All growth is a leap in the dark,  
a spontaneous unpremeditated act without the benefit of experience.”

~Henry Miller~

This work is dedicated to my family. My husband, Scott, was brave enough to take this leap with me. His love, support, and partnership throughout this very long journey have kept me going even during the most challenging of times. Without the bond we share I am certain I would not be where I am today. During this time not only have we grown, but our family has as well. My beautiful daughter, Emory, has brought so much joy to my life and has reminded me that smiles, laughter, and hugs go a very long way. I simply cannot express how grateful I am to be realizing a dream that only they can understand and cherish with me.

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“There is not a more pleasing exercise of the mind than gratitude. It is accompanied with such an inward satisfaction that the duty is sufficiently rewarded by the performance.”

~Joseph Addison~

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**ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP  
IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

**ABSTRACT**

In response to the increase in accountability, based on federal and state legislation, educators have searched for factors to positively impact student achievement. The Coleman Report (1966) stated that student socioeconomic status was the greatest predictor of academic success. Researchers and educators alike have worked to demonstrate that other factors within a school's control may be powerful predictors as well and may assist schools in overcoming this environmental obstacle. The purpose of this study was to examine academic optimism as a construct consisting of academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and trust in students and parents and their relationship to instructional leadership behaviors and student achievement among a sample of urban elementary schools in Virginia.

A convenience sample of 35 urban elementary schools in Virginia serving students K-5 was used to collect survey data from full-time teachers during a faculty meeting using the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey. Student achievement data were obtained from the 2008-2009 Virginia Standards of Learning assessment results in English and mathematics for students in grades 3 - 5.

The initial factor analysis confirmed that academic optimism is a unified construct comprised of academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and trust in students and parents. The construct of instructional leadership was also confirmed using a factor analysis to ensure the survey items pulled together and measured along a common factor. Correlational analyses demonstrated a moderate, positive relationship between academic

optimism and student achievement and academic optimism and instructional leadership even when controlling for socioeconomic status. Correlational analysis did not demonstrate a direct relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement. While limited, this study may offer educational practitioners insight on how instructional leaders can indirectly impact student achievement by creating a culture of academic optimism.

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**ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP  
IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

In 2001, a federal accountability program was implemented as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This program increased the expectations and demands for the nation's public school systems through the creation of measures to ensure that all students are proficient in reading and math. Particular emphasis has been placed on students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, students with limited English proficiency, and students of different racial and/or ethnic backgrounds. The NCLB Act requires annual testing in grades 3 through 8, and the law requires that schools, school districts, and states meet annually increasing benchmarks to claim Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on statewide tests in reading and mathematics. Each year pass rates for reading and mathematics increase with the intended result that 100 % of students in each subgroup pass by 2013-2014. When schools and districts fail to meet the annual benchmarks, corrective action plans must be developed and implemented to assist failing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). As a result of these increasing academic outcomes across the nation, schools and school districts have been searching for the right combination of instructional strategies and environmental conditions to optimize student achievement. The NCLB (2001) Act continues to push educators to grasp for characteristics and strategies to increase student achievement, especially students that fall into the categories of economically disadvantaged, ethnically diverse, having limited English proficiency, and those with disabilities. These accountability measures have forced schools and school districts to identify

characteristics to help foster a sense of community in which the faculty, students, and parents can work together to improve achievement results for all.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The Coleman Report (1966), a large-scale study commissioned by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to address educational equality concluded that student background and socioeconomic status (SES) are important predictors of student achievement as did multiple, earlier studies correlating SES and student achievement on standardized tests (Scheerens, 2000). This spurred educational researchers to identify school characteristics educators have control over, unlike socioeconomic status, that may in turn impact academic achievement (McGuigan & Hoy, 2005). Purkey and Smith (1982) created a synthesis of the research on effective schools. They identified numerous characteristics, such as high expectations for student achievement, strong instructional leadership, a safe school climate, and a culture rich in values and norms, which were related to increased achievement. Each of the studies on effective schools demonstrated success through any number of characteristics as evidenced by an increase in student achievement. As a result, an optimistic view began to develop among those in the field of education. Schools could make a positive academic impact despite students' socioeconomic status.

### **Academic Optimism**

While we cannot deny the impact of socioeconomic status, more current research has shown that there are malleable characteristics associated with academic achievement

that schools can control to evoke change. In fact, several have been identified as equally important as socioeconomic status. They include:

1. School's academic emphasis or press – The degree to which environmental forces press for student achievement on a school-wide basis (Gupton, 2003; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Lee & Smith, 1999; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, McEwan, 2003; Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982);
2. Collective teacher efficacy – The perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2003);
3. Faculty trust in students and parents – An individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy; 2001; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Most recently, McGuigan and Hoy (2006) studied academic emphasis, collective teacher efficacy, and faculty trust in students and parents and conceptualized them as one, unified construct called academic optimism. They defined academic optimism as a shared

belief among staff members that academic success is important, that staff have the capability to help students achieve, and that students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Through their research they demonstrated that creating an academically optimistic environment explains high academic performance even after controlling for students' socioeconomic status. Additionally, they found a relationship between enabling school structures and academic optimism. This contemporary research has identified promising practices for principals and organizations seeking to improve the achievement of all students during this current state of high-stakes testing and accountability.

Academic optimism is a unified construct comprised of collective teacher efficacy, trust in students in parents, and academic press. Each of the characteristics that make up academic optimism has been linked to increased student achievement. Academic emphasis, or the emphasis placed on academics at the school level, has been associated with academic achievement despite socioeconomic status (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). The collective nature of these three constructs is a powerful indicator of student achievement based on the research conducted on each one individually and the three of them collectively (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Wagner & DiPaola, in press).

Collective teacher efficacy is grounded in Bandura's (1993) social cognitive theory. His theory explains, "the ways people exercise some level of control over their lives and their beliefs in their own capabilities to organize and execute a course of action



to produce an outcome” (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000, p. 480). Collective teacher efficacy has been studied and has been found to have a *significant* effect on academic achievement (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 2004).

Finally, faculty and trust in students and parents accounts for the belief that students will put forth their best effort and parents will support the teaching and learning process. Several studies have demonstrated the significant and positive effect trust has on student achievement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Goddard et al., 2001; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

Additionally, Hoy et al. (2006) have explained academic optimism in terms of school organizational dimensions. Collective teacher efficacy falls into the cognitive domain and is a group belief. Faculty trust in students and parents is affective in nature and provides an emotional connection among individuals in a group setting. Academic press is behavioral and accounts for the academic purpose of the school and community. The three characteristics that interact to form the academic optimism construct create a positive learning culture that can be represented through cognitive, affective, and behavioral means (Wagner & DiPaola, in press).

### **Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership began to take shape in the 1980s as the descriptor of what good leaders contribute to effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Wimpelberg, 1992; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Hallinger (2000) developed a model of instructional leadership that is comprised of three dimensions: defining the school’s

mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate. Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005) reviewed models of instructional leadership and provided a simplified model with three elements of instructional leadership: defining and communicating goals, monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process, and promoting and emphasizing the importance of professional development. Both models describe the direct or indirect behaviors principals display that impact teaching and learning. Researchers continue to explore leadership behaviors that actually correlate with academic achievement. Principals can influence what happens in the classroom by setting goals to outline a school's purpose, defining a school's mission, and aligning school structures (Bamburg & Andrews, 1991; Goldring & Pasternak, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis identified those instructional leadership responsibilities with the highest effect sizes, albeit indirect, on student achievement. They include promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; strategic resourcing; establishing goals and expectations; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Another study linking instructional leadership behaviors to student achievement is a meta-analysis conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) that resulted in the identification of 21 leadership responsibilities.

Leaders who operate under the instructional leadership framework are more likely to create a positive climate through goal setting and high expectations for teaching and learning (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). They work to form relationships and create a climate that builds a sense of trust, creates positive belief systems, and increases the sense

of personal responsibility in others (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Such a climate facilitates teaching and learning and can have lasting effects on student achievement and success as a building.

Facets of instructional leadership have also been linked to academic optimism (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Structures within an organization that allow teachers to feel empowered and effective in their work through the use of expertise, communication, and flexible roles are seen as enabling leadership characteristics (Sinden, Hoy, & Sweetland, 2004). Organizational structures, rules, and behaviors are all seen as important facets of enabling schools and directly relate to leadership style. Mendel, Watson, and MacGregor (2002) found that teachers rated their school as more positive if their principals were collaborative. Collaborative leaders facilitate reflection and discussion regarding teaching and work to establish partnerships within the school to share and guide using expertise.

The conceptual framework for this study originates in the emerging research on academic optimism in public schools as well as the research base pertaining to the impact of instructional leadership on student achievement. This study explores the research on academic optimism and its relationship to student achievement, academic optimism and its relationship to instructional leadership, as well as instructional leadership and its relationship to student achievement at the elementary school level. Figure 1 depicts these relationships.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

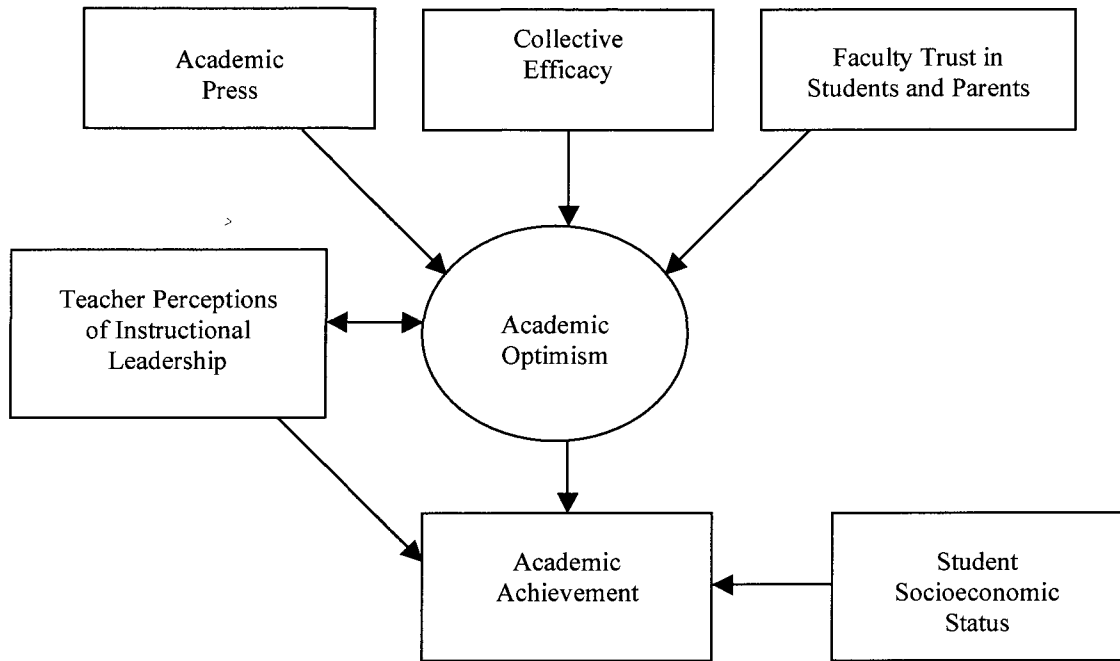


Figure 1: The conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between academic optimism, teacher perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement.

In this framework student achievement is the dependent variable. Each of the independent variables, teacher perceptions of academic optimism, and instructional leadership are seen as contributing factors to student achievement. Additionally, the relationship between teacher perceptions of academic optimism and instructional leadership is explored.

### **Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to build upon the growing research base on academic optimism, its relationship with teacher perceptions of instructional leadership and their culminating effects on student achievement in a sample of urban Virginia elementary

schools. In his study of the effects of organizational citizenship behavior on student achievement in 36 public Virginia high schools, Wagner (2008) found significant, positive relationships between academic optimism and student achievement in each of the four content areas measured after controlling for socioeconomic status. From a sample of 40 suburban and rural elementary schools in Ohio, McGuigan and Hoy (2006) found that academic optimism is correlated with school-level academic achievement, even when controlling for socioeconomic status. This supports the belief that while educators cannot control the socioeconomic status of a student or the environment in which they are raised, they can control malleable constructs such as academic emphasis, teacher efficacy, trust, beliefs, and structures that can directly impact student achievement and how students perform within the confines of the school building. Understanding how academic optimism is formed and what can increase its effectiveness is an important link to how we can help teachers and students perform to increase academic achievement.

Research pertaining to instructional leadership and its impact on student achievement has produced inconsistent findings but continues to be a topic of great interest. Does instructional leadership directly or indirectly impact student achievement? Does it relate to cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions? These are questions that have been explored in the research (Bulach, Boothe, & Pickett, 1998; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). Hattie (2009) conducted a meta-analysis and found higher effect sizes for five specific instructional leadership dimensions on student outcomes at the elementary school level. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) found 21 specific leadership responsibilities significantly related to

increased levels of student achievement in their meta-analysis. This meta-analysis is cited often in the literature since it claims that there is a substantial relationship between leadership and achievement. Heroic stories about principals and their impact on schools prevail. John Maxwell (1998) stated that everything rises and falls on the leadership within an organization. How important are instructional leaders in producing an effective academic environment?

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guiding this study are:

1. Do academic emphasis, teacher-self efficacy, and teacher' trust in parents and students in this population covary to form an overall construct of academic optimism?
2. Do the 6 items in the measure of instructional leadership on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey covary to form the construct instructional leadership?
3. To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to academic optimism in their schools?
4. To what extent is academic optimism related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status?
5. To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. Academic emphasis, teacher-self efficacy, and teacher trust in parents and students form a more general construct called academic optimism.
2. The six items in the measure of instructional leadership on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey form a more general construct called instructional leadership.
3. Teacher perceptions of instructional leadership are directly and positively related to academic optimism.
4. Student achievement is directly and positively related to academic optimism as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in English and mathematics for grades 3-5, when controlling for socioeconomic status.
5. Student achievement is directly and positively related to teacher perceptions of instructional leadership, as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in English and mathematics for grades 3-5, when controlling for socioeconomic status.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions of terms that will be used for this study are listed below:

*Academic Emphasis* – also known as academic press; a school’s quest for academic excellence through goals, beliefs, environment, and pursuit of academic success (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000).

*Academic Optimism* – a general belief that students will achieve academically (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Academic

emphasis, collective efficacy, and trust in parents and students are the three dimensions that make up academic optimism.

*Collective Efficacy* – a collective, group judgment that the group as a whole can cause a particular outcome (Bandura, 1997).

*Elementary Schools* – public schools providing instruction to students in grades PK-5.

*Enabling Structures* – organizational structures and processes that help, rather than hinder, teachers' work performance (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001).

*Instructional Leadership* - direct or indirect behaviors that impact teacher instruction and student learning (Daresh & Playko, 1995).

*Socioeconomic Status (SES)* – is a combined measure of students' economic/poverty level. For this study, the eligibility of students in a school receiving free or reduced priced lunch will serve as a proxy for SES. Free and reduced price lunch will be gathered from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) reports.

*Student Achievement* – academic performance, based on students' scaled scores, as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests for English and math each instructional year in grades 3, 4, and 5. These assessments are criterion-references and are administered at the end of each school year to all Virginia elementary school students in the prescribed grades. A scaled score of 400 – 600 is passing. Retention and promotion are not tied to SOL tests at the elementary level.



*Teacher Self-Efficacy* – “an individual’s belief in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning” (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993).

*Trust* – a willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other party is benevolent, reliable, competent, open, and honest (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

### **Summary**

Given current state and federal accountability standards, it is important that schools and school leaders understand the variables that can positively impact their students’ learning and achievement. Academic optimism and instructional leadership have been shown to be related to student achievement. This study examines how instructional leadership correlates with academic optimism to enhance its effectiveness and ultimately impact student achievement positively.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature associated with the variables being studied, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the each. This provides theoretical support for the research hypotheses stated.

#### **Effective Schools**

Research on effective schools has been extensively studied in an attempt to compile the most effective techniques to form a model of how schools should operate to ensure student academic success. This is a complicated endeavor since schools often operate bureaucratically. In essence, schools are filled with a myriad of structures and policies that govern every element of the school day. Scheerens' (2000) definition of an effective school succinctly states that school effectiveness is the performance of a school expressed as output, which is measured by the achievements of that school's students. Research has identified a number of variables that contribute to school success as well as a number of internal and external influences that impact the complex organization of a school.

Early research, such as the Coleman Report, expressed that schools had little to no effect on student performance and achievement, and differences in school effectiveness could be widely attributed to family background and socioeconomic status (Coleman et al., 1966). Such research suggested that little could be done to overcome the social issues that seemed to pervade schools.

These findings were disconcerting for many scholars in search of more malleable school-level factors, beyond those presented in the home and/or familial environment, which could make the difference and positively impact student achievement. In a review of effective school studies, Purkey and Smith (1982) created a portrait of an effective school by outlining nine variables aligned to the organizational structure of a school that positively impacted student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status. The nine variables presented in their study include:

- Site-based management at the school level
- Effective instructional leadership
- Stability of the staff
- A clear outline and focus on curriculum
- School-wide staff development that aligns with the instructional program
- Parental support
- Honoring of academic achievements
- Protection of instructional time and emphasizing time on task
- Guidance and support from the district level

Each of the variables listed above are meant to evoke change in the school culture and climate and outline a framework for schools to utilize to positively impact student outcomes.

Hallinger and Murphy (1986) looked at social context as it relates to effective schools. They found that the socioeconomic status of the effective schools studied impacted the effectiveness of any identifiable variables. The variables included:

- Clearly stated school mission
- Highly organized curriculum
- Allocation, organization, and protection of instructional time
- Instructional leadership
- Cooperation and support between home and school
- Student recognition
- Development of high expectations

While these variables were strong indicators of school effectiveness and were found to positively impact student achievement, there were differences in their emphasis when looking at the social context of individual schools. Schools with a lower socioeconomic environment tended to be more focused on basic skill attainment, possess an instructional leader who was very directive and task-oriented, utilize more elaborate and frequent reward systems, and bore the sole responsibility of creating and maintaining high expectations for students. More recent research suggests that while principals do bear the brunt of accountability, there is a trend to extend the scope of effort among teachers, assistant principals, and community stakeholders to move schools in a positive direction (May & Supovitz, 2011). There is a sense of shared responsibility that allows the principal to fulfill more of the instructional leadership tasks rather than the managerial tasks.

While effective school research attempted to define factors outside of the social context, it is clear that not every effective school operates under the same rules or procedures since they have different contexts. Other variables also have an impact on

school effectiveness. Schools are seen as bureaucratic, but they are also humanistic in nature. They deal with human beings that bring their own social, emotional, and educational backgrounds that shape behavior. Deal and Kennedy (1983) state that organizational culture has much to do with the productivity of schools, and school leaders play a part in outlining the values and rituals that shape this environment and in turn effect student achievement. This belief system leads one to ponder how much school effectiveness is largely driven by a collection of individuals.

While there is a solid research base to consult, there is no definitive recipe for school effectiveness. This fact has sparked a myriad of research on attributes that clearly make a difference in student outcomes but are under the control of school leadership (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Recent research does look at the school organization in relationship to its more humanistic side. Factors, outside of socioeconomic status, such as collective efficacy, trust, academic press, and instructional leadership have all been examined to better understand the relationship between school success and the characteristics individuals and/or groups may need to possess in order to effect real change (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2004; Hallinger, 2005; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

Coleman's landmark study in 1966 stated that schools had a minimal impact on student achievement in comparison to family and community background influences. This placed a negative connotation on a school's efforts and emphasized that the only real factor that influencing a school's output is the child who enters the school. As academic

accountability has increased, the search for characteristics that can be influenced at the school level to impact student achievement have increased. Beard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2009) opine:

One of the most important contributions educational researchers can make to the field is to identify properties of schools...that make a real difference in academic achievement of students. Socioeconomic status (SES) always has a strong impact upon academic achievement, but SES is not amenable to significant change by teachers or administrators. We need to identify factors that go beyond SES to affect achievement. The search for such variables, especially those that school leaders can influence or that are under the control of individual teachers themselves, has been elusive. (p. 20)

Researchers have been feverishly tracking school and student data to identify schools that are making academic gains to extract and define the factors that positively impact student achievement. One construct, academic optimism, appears to be demonstrating promise in this area.

### **Academic Optimism**

Academic optimism is a construct developed by Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) that has been associated with school achievement, despite student socioeconomic status (SES). The three school properties that make up academic optimism are academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in parents and students. They work together and reinforce one another to create a culture of academic optimism within the school setting. Hoy and McGuigan (2006) define academic optimism as:

A shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty has the capacity to help students achieve, and that students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them in this endeavor – in brief, a schoolwide confidence that students will succeed academically. (p. 2)

A number of studies have linked academic optimism to school achievement, even when controlling for socioeconomic status of students (Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy & Smith, 2007; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Wagner & DiPaola, in press). As school leaders search for ways to improve student achievement, academic optimism is a construct that offers hope that there are factors that are malleable and can be nurtured to produce positive results.

**Academic emphasis.** Academic emphasis is the behavioral aspect of academic optimism and is sometimes referred to as academic press. It can be defined as the “extent to which a school is driven by academic excellence” (Hoy et al., 2007, p. 201). Academic emphasis has become a focal point of research in light of the accountability movement stemmed by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) that emphasizes academic press for all students. Like collective efficacy, academic emphasis is influenced by teachers’ beliefs about the importance of academics and the part it plays in developing school goals (Goddard et al., 2000).

Academic emphasis can be impacted by a school’s climate. Hoy and Miskel (2000) describe school climate as a “relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools” (p. 4). School climates that are

focused on high expectations, high standards, and an orderly environment have a positive impact on student learning (Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983). How serious a school is about educating all students is at the heart of academic emphasis. Behaviors associated with a culture of academic emphasis include high achievable goals for students, respect for student achievement by students, and support provided by the school leader to achieve the school's goals (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000).

Several studies have reported academic emphasis as a school characteristic that is directly and positively related to student achievement (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Hoy & Tarter, 1997; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Lee & Smith, 1999; Shouse, 1996; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006). Hoy et al. (2006) examined studies on this subject and reported:

Whether the analysis was multiple regression, structural modeling, or hierarchal linear modeling, or whether the level was elementary, middle, or secondary, the findings are the same: academic emphasis is a key variable in explaining student achievement, even controlling for socioeconomic status, previous achievement, and other demographic variables. (p. 427)

In a study of academic emphasis in 45 urban elementary schools in one school district, findings suggested that academic press explained about half of the between school differences (Goddard, Sweetland, et al., 2000). Lee and Bryk (1989) found a positive relationship between a school's academic focus and student achievement despite socioeconomic status. In another study of middle school teachers, academic emphasis was correlated with math, reading, and writing achievement when controlling for



socioeconomic factors (Hoy & Sabo, 1998). Hoy et al. (2007) found that schools that focus on academics, recognize hard work and achievement, and act and behave in ways that reflect these beliefs motivate their students to work hard and meet the high expectations set for them.

Bandura's (1997) theory of reciprocal causality meshes well with the idea that as a school experiences success, as defined by increased student achievement, academic emphasis will increase and motivate students to achieve at higher levels. Improving the academic emphasis in a school can be accomplished through encouragement and sustaining a culture of high expectations and rigor (Goddard et al., 2000; Leithwood, 2007; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006).

**Collective efficacy.** Collective efficacy is considered a cognitive aspect that represents the judgment of teachers regarding the extent to which they can organize and execute actions that have positive effects on students (Hoy, 2010). Collective efficacy is a concept derived from the work of Albert Bandura (1997) who defined efficacy beliefs as "future oriented judgments about capabilities to organize and accomplish courses of action needed to produce the results desired for specific situations or contexts" (p. 271). Bandura's human agency theory states that humans make choices based on cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors and what one may believe will be the outcome of a behavior. In line with Bandura's theory, teachers' beliefs about their capabilities can grow out of mastery and vicarious learning experiences, the affective state of the organization, social persuasion, and organizational structures and policies (Goddard, Hoy et al., 2000; Rosenholtz, 1989). Goddard and Skrla (2006) posit that the stronger an

organization's efficacy beliefs the more sustained effort teachers will put forth to attain their goal. If efficacy beliefs are low then a goal is seen as unobtainable and effort will be seen as fruitless.

In schools, collective efficacy can powerfully influence the social norms of a school (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). There have been a number of studies that have established significant positive relationships between collective efficacy and student achievement (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, Hoy, et al., 2000; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Goddard & Skrla, 2006; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002). Bandura (1993) was the first to support a relationship between a school's sense of collective efficacy and school performance even when controlling for socioeconomic status. Additional studies have also found collective efficacy to be a strong predictor of student achievement, despite low socioeconomic status (Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). "Schools in which the faculty had a strong sense of collective efficacy flourished, whereas those in which faculty members had serious doubts about the collective efficacy declined in academic performance or showed little academic progress" (Hoy et al., 2006, p. 428). Collective efficacy beliefs influence teacher behaviors, which in turn influences student achievement.

A faculty's ability and willingness to persevere and believe in its effectiveness at both the elementary (Goddard et al., 2000) and high school (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002) levels positively impacts student achievement. Collective efficacy can work for or against academic goal setting. It is an enduring school quality that must be sustained over

time. If a group of teachers does not believe that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds can succeed then low collective efficacy will persevere. In contrast, if a group of teachers feels that all students can and will succeed and hold all students to a high level of expectations despite their socioeconomic status then high levels of collective efficacy will prevail. Establishing the norms of the school that form the culture and positive feelings of the staff takes effort (Bandura, 1997). School leaders searching for a way to positively influence student achievement can look to collective efficacy as a school characteristic that can be molded to positively impact students.

**Trust in parents and students.** Trust is considered to be the affective aspect of academic optimism. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) define trust as an “individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p. 203). Trust opens one up to vulnerability or the ability to rely on another and feel that the actions of that someone will benefit and not harm you. This rings very true for parents who send their children off to school each day. Tschannen-Moran (2004) defines the different facets of trust:

1. Benevolence is the assumption of good will from others.
2. Reliability is being able to depend on another consistently.
3. Competence is the ability to perform a task as expected.
4. Honesty concerns a person’s character, integrity, and authenticity.
5. Openness makes people vulnerable to others by sharing information, influence, and control.

The different facets of trust work together and are dependent on one another, but they may be weighted differently depending upon the situation. While one's own thoughts about trust can influence how much one is willing to trust, in schools, trust can also be influenced by practices, policies, culture, and leadership (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Schools must create climates that support and build trust.

High levels of trust have been positively correlated to student achievement even when controlling for SES (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest that "trust is important for organizations that operate in turbulent external environments that depend heavily on information sharing for success and whose work processes demand effective decentralized decision making" (p. 33) which is a very accurate depiction of any school organization. Hoy (2006) understood the importance of trust as it related to student learning and theorized:

Trusting others is a fundamental aspect of human learning because learning is typically a cooperative process, and distrust makes cooperation virtually impossible. When students, teachers, and parents have common learning goals, trust and cooperation are likely ingredients that improve teaching and learning. (p. 430)

Faculty trust in parents and students has been correlated with positive practices that include increased collaboration among stakeholders, engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors, promotion of risk-tolerant climates, and improvement in

productivity (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Faculty members are more likely to seek out new ideas and commit to the school's goals when there are high levels of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). A lack of trust has been linked to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and estrangement all of which can be detrimental to schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). The concept of closing one's door and teaching in an isolated bubble can no longer exist. Faculty must reach out to one another and those around them to form trusting, effective relationships that positively impact student performance. Trust is an essential building block of academic success that must be nurtured and fostered to have any real impact.

### **Instructional Leadership**

According to John Maxell (1998) everything rises and falls on the leadership in an organization. The research on the need for strong leadership has been prevalent over the past 25 years. It has become increasingly scrutinized due to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that requires all students to make steady progress toward state mandated proficiency standards. Leithwood and Reihl (2003, p. 20) state that the overall focus is "schools as effective organizations that support and sustain the performance of teachers as well as students." According to Hallinger (2005):

At the turn of the century, the American infatuation with performance standards has become a global love affair. Principals again find themselves at the nexus of accountability and school improvement with an increasingly explicit expectation that they will function as 'instructional leaders.' Given the passage of formal government standards for education through the world, principals who ignore

their role in monitoring and improving school performance do so at their own risk. (p. 223)

A popular assumption is that reform is dependent upon behaviors and capacities, and that school leaders should be the great producers of educational reform. “School principals are increasingly held accountable for educational quality in the belief that students’ success or failure is determined by the way a school is run” (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003, p. 400). Much of the research about school effectiveness and the ability of school leaders to impact student achievement was in response to the Coleman Report’s assertion that schools had very little effect on student performance as compared to environmental factors (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood & Weinfeld, 1966).

Edmonds (1977) was one of the first researchers to challenge the Coleman findings. Based on his observations of principals in effective, urban schools, Edmonds developed a list of effective school characteristics that were present in these schools that have since provided a guide for future research. The list included strong principal leadership, high expectations for student achievement, an emphasis on basic skill attainment, an orderly environment, and frequent and systematic evaluations of students. Researchers have worked earnestly to identify leadership characteristics that sustain educational reform.

In a study conducted by Andrews and Soder (1987), gain scores of students in schools with strong instructional leaders were significantly greater in reading and math than those students in schools with average or weak leaders. According to Hallinger and Heck (1996), research has shown that “strong administrative leadership was among those

factors within the school that make a difference in student learning” (p. 5) while acknowledging the limited, direct relationship between school leadership and student achievement. “The size of the effects that principals indirectly contribute toward student learning, though statistically significant, is also quite small” (Hallinger, 2005, p. 229).

The question is now, how can school administrators positively influence student outcomes? Instructional leadership was a frequent topic of research in the 1990s and has since become a multi-faceted approach to defining effective leadership characteristics. It is often identified in the literature as strong, directive leadership with a focus on curriculum and instruction (Hallinger, 2003). Hattie (2009) refers to instructional leadership as “those principals who have their major focus on creating a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for teachers and students” (p. 83).

**Models of instructional leadership.** Hallinger and Murphy (1985) developed their model of instructional leadership through studies at the elementary school level. The three dimensions they identified include:

- Defining the school’s mission
- Managing the instructional program
- Promoting a positive school climate

Murphy (1990) continued to expand the above model to include four dimensions of instructional leadership that include:

- Developing a school’s mission and goals
- Managing educational production

- Promoting an academic learning climate
- Developing a supportive work environment

Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2004) defined instructional leadership based on three dimensions and used these to develop the Instructional Leadership Inventory (ILI). The three dimensions include:

- Defining and communicating shared goals
- Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process
- Promoting school-wide professional development

Based on their meta-analysis, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identified 21 leadership responsibilities that are significantly correlated to student achievement. The list of responsibilities includes:

- Culture
- Order
- Discipline
- Resources
- Curriculum, instruction, assessment
- Focus
- Knowledge of curriculum, instructional assessment
- Visibility
- Contingent rewards
- Communication
- Outreach



- Input
- Affirmation
- Relationships
- Change agent
- Optimizer
- Ideals/beliefs
- Monitors/evaluates
- Flexibility
- Situational awareness
- Intellectual stimulation

Each of these models includes elements of instructional leadership that are similar and include behaviors and influences that are directly and indirectly related to student achievement.

Hattie (2009) found effect sizes were greater for instructional leadership compared to other types of leadership and were even higher at the elementary school level. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of the research related to instructional leadership behaviors and the effects on student achievement and found the correlation to be .25. This correlation is much higher than that found in the meta-analysis conducted by Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) who reported an average correlation of .02 between school leadership and student achievement. Why the difference? Witzier's study examined multinational studies looking at direct and indirect effects of leadership while Marzano's study focused on the indirect impact of leadership.

It is also important to note that Marzano's study included numerous theses and dissertations that did not undergo the same peer review process. Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) concluded their research by stating that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (p. 5) and posit that much of the existing research underestimates the effect of school leadership on student learning outcomes. While Hallinger and Heck (1996) claim that school leaders have a small and indirect impact on students, there is research that supports the notion that school leaders can and do make a difference with respect to student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009; Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009; May & Supovitz, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Whether the impact of instructional leadership on student achievement is accomplished through direct actions or indirect actions, it is worthwhile to look at which instructional leadership behaviors and practices have merit. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found that the dimensions that impacted student achievement the most were related to teacher behaviors, including designing and implementing effective strategies, holding professional conversations related to raising student achievement, creating high expectations and goals for students, and monitoring student progress. This supports the thought that effective, instructional leaders indirectly support and impact student achievement through the support of their teaching staff.

Most of the research demonstrates that instructional leaders contribute to student achievement outcomes indirectly through the influence they create on school and

classroom conditions (Hallinger, 2005). Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2004) found that while there is little to no direct relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement, instructional leaders have the ability to directly influence teachers and students in the classroom. One such influence is that of academic press. They found that the instructional leadership of the school principal is manifested through the academic expectations within the school building. Rice (2010) stated instructional leaders influence student achievement through the recruitment and motivation of quality teachers, the articulation of vision, effective allocation of resources, and the development of supports for teaching and learning. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found strong average effects for promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. The more instructional leaders focus on teaching and learning the greater outcome for student achievement.

DiPaola and Smith (2008) found that “interpersonal relationships among teachers and between principals and teachers directly shape motivation and behavior” (p. 117) which then impacts students. The way in which teachers and instructional leaders interact can indirectly impact student achievement. This facet of instructional leadership is what is explored through this study. How are teachers’ perceptions of instructional leadership related to student achievement? How is the effectiveness of instructional leaders perceived through various behaviors?

### **Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement**

A number of studies have shown that the socioeconomic status of students has an impact on student achievement (Coleman et. al., 1966; Hoy et al., 2006; Hoy et al., 2007;

Hoy & Hannum, 1997). The Coleman Report infamously concluded that family background and environment were the most important variables in predicting student achievement outcomes in school and that school-level variables had little to no impact. While there is little argument that socioeconomic status does influence student achievement, a body of research on school effectiveness argues that there are malleable characteristics that have an impact regardless of socioeconomic status (Edmonds, 1979; Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) is a federal law requiring that all students make steady progress toward state-determined proficiency standards, regardless of their background or ability. The intent of this piece of legislation is to raise achievement levels for all students and produce research-based strategies that support instruction.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the tool for measuring how successful schools and school districts are at meeting proficiency goals in reading and mathematics, established by the state in accordance with NCLB. As part of this legislation, all students must participate in statewide testing. Goals are established for all students and NCLB subgroups that include major ethnic groups, students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students. Those meeting the prescribed objectives are defined as meeting AYP. The proficiency level is raised each year, and NCLB requires that all students are 100% proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. For the purpose of this study, the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments in

mathematics and reading for grades 3-5 are being used to measure academic achievement.

Achievement can be simply defined as the acquisition of knowledge and skills and can be influenced by various factors. Research on school climate and culture suggests that it can have a major impact on achievement. According to Barth (2002),

A school's culture is a complex pattern of norms, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act. (p. 7)

School climate and culture can have a major impact on achievement as they affect how individuals are motivated in an organization. "Interpersonal relationships among teachers and between principals and teachers directly shape motivation and behavior" (DiPaola & Smith, 2008, p. 117) which can indirectly impact students. A school's climate and culture are formed by the people who work there and can take shape through collaboration among colleagues, communicating high expectations for all, and establishing an environment that is conducive to learning. Such malleable influences may be explained through research on academic optimism and instructional leadership characteristics as discussed earlier.

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between academic optimism, teacher perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement. This study, building prior research on the topics of academic optimism and instructional

leadership, develops a better understanding of their relationship to student achievement at the elementary school level in an urban setting. Through this study, quantitative data are utilized to add to the current body of research on these topics, perhaps inform other practitioners, and add to the list of strategies to increase student achievement.

### **Summary**

McEwan (2003) stated “how you act every day makes a difference in the educational lives of students” (p. 139). Identifying actions that have an impact on students will be the focus of this study. This chapter began with a brief description of the research on effective schools, followed by a review of the literature on academic optimism and instructional leadership. The next chapter will provide a description of the methodology used to address the research questions posed in the first chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

While academic optimism has been positively correlated with student achievement (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, Parish, & DiPaola, 2006; Wagner & DiPaola, in press), the impact of instructional leadership qualities on student outcomes is still debated (Hallinger, 2003; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Robinson, Loyd, & Rowe, 2008). The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships that exist among academic optimism, perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement, as measured by Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) reading and math assessments for third, fourth, and fifth grades. The hope is to build upon prior research on the relationship between academic optimism and student achievement and instructional leadership and student achievement, while extending our understanding of how instructional leadership may relate to academic optimism, specifically looking at teachers' perceptions of their leader. This study may offer quantitative evidence that leads us to a better understanding of how factors that are within our control can impact student achievement. This chapter provides an explanation of the methodology used to answer the research questions posed. The sample population, data collection procedures, research instrumentation, and data analysis procedures are outlined.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this study:

1. Do academic emphasis, teacher-self efficacy, and teacher' trust in parents and students in this population covary to form an overall construct of academic optimism?
2. Do the 6 items in the measure of instructional leadership on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey covary to form the construct instructional leadership?
3. To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to academic optimism in their schools?
4. To what extent is academic optimism related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status?
5. To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status?

### **Population and Sample**

Norfolk Public Schools (NPS) is an urban school district located in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The district is the eighth largest district and contains 35 elementary, 8 middle, and 5 high schools and serves approximately 34,000 students supported by more than 5,000 employees. The stated belief of the school district is that all students can achieve at high levels. The student population is ethnically and economically diverse with 60% of students considered economically disadvantaged, approximately 64% African-American, 24% white, and 4% Hispanic (Norfolk Public Schools, 2009). In 2005, Norfolk Public Schools won the \$1 million Broad Prize for Urban Education award for having demonstrated overall performance and improvement



in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps for minority and economically disadvantaged students. While they continue to plan and work for sustainable school improvement, they continue to struggle with meeting the Virginia State Assessment Standards. According to the Virginia Department of Education's Division Report Card for the 2009-2010 school year, NPS did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) based on the following areas:

- English performance for Black Students, Economically Disadvantaged Students, Students with Limited English Proficiency, and Students with Disabilities
- Mathematics performance for Black Students, Economically Disadvantaged Students, and Students with Disabilities
- Other Performance Indicators identified as Science and Graduation

The sample for this research study included full-time teachers and instructional staff members from 35 public elementary schools serving PK-5 students in the Norfolk Public School district.

### **Data Sample and Collection Procedures**

Participation in this study was encouraged but voluntary. Surveys were administered during faculty meetings at each school. This ensured a greater number of participants and allowed for a better reflection and representation of the faculty and staff through a larger sample size. Surveys were distributed to a representative at each of the 35 schools and picked up at a later date. The participants in this study completed 1,292 usable surveys that included the three dimensions of academic optimism and faculty perceptions of instructional leadership. The school is the unit of analysis for this study,

and all data will be aggregated to that level. Table 1 provides a detailed description of the sample while comparing it to Virginia's elementary schools.

Table 1

*Sample Descriptive Statistics and Comparisons*

Classifications	Sample (N=35)	Virginia
PK-5 Elementary Schools*	35	1229
Mean School Enrollment	526	494
School Districts	1	132
% FRL **	64.75	38.36
% American Indian	.18	.28
% Asian	2.19	5.68
% Black	62.24	25.37
% Hispanic	4.63	10
% White	23.12	54.78
% Hawaiian	0	.13
% Unspecified	7.63	3.76

\*33 schools are PK-5, 1 is K-8, 1 is K-5

\*\*FRL = Percentage of Students Receiving Free or Reduced Lunch (Virginia Department of Education, 2008)

### **Instrumentation**

The data collected for this study were taken from a survey developed for NPS based on various research and data collection tools. The Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey includes variables to explore teacher and school climate, including the

three dimensions of academic optimism and faculty perceptions of instructional leadership. Teacher climate variables surveyed included teacher self-efficacy, teacher collective efficacy, teacher trust in administration, teacher trust in colleagues, and teacher trust in clients. School climate variables surveyed included collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, academic press, community engagement, organizational citizenship behaviors, and teacher perceptions of instructional leadership. The variables analyzed for this study are academic emphasis, teacher collective efficacy, faculty trust in clients, and teacher perceptions of instructional leadership.

### **Academic Emphasis**

The data collected for NPS used a six item subscale from the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) developed by Hoy and colleagues (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991) and utilizes a five-point Likert scale ranging from Never to Very Frequent. Sample items include “The school sets high standards for academic performance” and “Students try hard to improve on previous work.”

### **Collective Efficacy**

The data collected for NPS utilized the Collective Teacher Belief Scales (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) to measure collective teacher efficacy on two different subscales: student discipline and instructional strategies. Items in the student discipline subscale include “How much can teachers in your school do to establish rules and procedures that facilitate learning,” and “How much can teachers in your school do to control disruptive behavior.” Items in the instructional strategies subscale include “How much can teachers in your school do to help students master complex content” and “How

much can teachers in your school do to produce meaningful student learning.” This scale has groundings in Bandura’s unpublished teacher efficacy scale and consists of 12 items measuring teachers’ perceptions about the collective ability of their faculty to influence student achievement on a 9 point uni-dimensional scale ranging from Nothing to a Great Deal.

### **Trust In Parents and Students**

The data collected for NPS used nine items from the Omnibus T Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) that asks participants to describe the levels of trust of their school in students and parents on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Sample items include “Students in this school can be counted on to do their work” and “Teachers can count on parental support.”

### **Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Leadership**

The data collected for NPS used a six-item subscale utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Items were not developed according to any one data collection tool, but were chosen by NPS based on what they felt were pertinent to the needs of the school system. Sample items include “The school’s administration knows what is going on in my classroom” and “The school’s administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.”

### **Student Achievement Measures**

The Virginia Department of Education has developed the Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools as a measure to monitor expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12. The Standards of Learning are based on a curriculum

framework developed to provide specific knowledge and skills that students must acquire. Students are assessed on these standards via the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments. Scaled scores measure students' understanding of the curriculum as either failing (399 and below), passing (400 to 499), or advanced proficient (500 to 600). This study uses the Virginia Standards of Learning assessment scaled scores for students in grades 3-5 in the areas of English and mathematics as a proxy for student achievement and its relationship with academic optimism and/or teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership.

### **Socioeconomic Status**

This study controls for student socioeconomic status to help determine a more accurate correlation between academic optimism, perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement. For this study, baseline data for socioeconomic status are established through student participation in the federal free and reduced priced lunch program. This statistic generally characterizes family income and/or poverty level as represented by the number of students in a school receiving a free or reduce-price lunch. Data are obtained from school division reports available from the Virginia Department of Education.

### **Data Analysis**

This study is a quantitative correlational study that examines the relationships among academic optimism, teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement. The unit of analysis is the 35 individual schools and data are aggregated to the

school level allowing for comparisons. Table 2 is a Data Analysis Chart that summarizes the information that is analyzed and the statistical methods that are used to study the relationships.

Table 2

*Data Analysis Chart*

Research Questions	Data Sources	Data Analysis
1. Do academic emphasis, teacher-self efficacy, and teacher' trust in parents and students in this population covary to form an overall construct of academic optimism?	NPS Teacher Climate Survey instrument: A13-24, B1, B8, B9, B12, B13, B17, B21, B23, B25, D5, D6, D14, D15, D21, D22	Factor Analysis
2. Do the 6 items in the measure of instructional leadership on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey covary to form the construct instructional leadership?	NPS Teacher Climate Survey instrument: E9-14	Factor Analysis
3. To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to academic optimism in their schools?	NPS Teacher Climate Survey instrument: A13-24; B1, B8, B9, B12, B13, B17, B21, B23, B25, D5, D6, D14, D15, D21, D22, E9-14	Correlations Analysis Using Pearson R
4. To what extent is academic optimism related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status?	NPS Teacher Climate Survey instrument: A13-24; B1, B8, B9, B12, B13, B17, B21, B23, B25, D5, D6, D14, D15, D21, D22  35 Elementary Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-5 SOL Reading Assessment Scores</li> <li>• 3-5 SOL Mathematics Assessment Scores</li> </ul> Socioeconomic Data	Correlations Analysis Using Pearson R
5. To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status?	NPS Teacher Climate Survey instrument: E9-14  35 Elementary Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-5 SOL Reading Assessment Scores</li> <li>• 3-5 SOL Mathematics Assessment Scores</li> </ul> Socioeconomic Data	Correlations Analysis Using Pearson R

### **Ethical Safeguards**

Norfolk Public Schools administered the survey being utilized for this study according to established district policies. Participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary and the school personnel would not examine individual information. The Department of Research and Testing kept information secure and confidential. Individual responses were anonymous and schools were not identifiable on an individual basis. Data collection was approved by the Protection of Human Subjects Committee to ensure compliance with appropriate ethical standards.

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

Limitations refer to restrictions on a study that the researcher has no control over, and delimitations refer to limitations on a study that have been imposed deliberately by the researcher (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). The limitations of this study include:

- The voluntary nature of responses, since teachers were not required to participate.
- The Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey being utilized for this study was developed in 2008 and additional items could not be added.
- The Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey was developed within the school division and those working within the school division collected data.
- Student achievement was measured solely by the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments for students in grades 3-5 in the areas of English and mathematics.
- This is a correlational study, and thus causal effects were not determined.



The delimitation of this study includes:

- The sample for this study is 35 urban elementary schools in one school district, Norfolk Public Schools, which limits the ability to generalize findings. While this impacts the external validity of the results, it may be useful for other schools of similar populations.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Data Analysis**

This study examined the relationship between academic optimism, instructional leadership, and student achievement in urban elementary schools within one school district. The study sought to build upon prior research and extend our understanding on the topics of academic optimism and instructional leadership and their relationship to student achievement. Academic optimism is a construct developed by Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy (2006) that has been associated with school achievement, even when controlling for student socioeconomic status. Academic optimism is comprised of three school properties: academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in parents and students. They represent the behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006, 2007; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Wagner, 2008). Further analyses assessed the relative effects of academic optimism, comprised of its three properties, and instructional leadership on student achievement.

The Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey 2008-2009, examining several teacher and school climate variables, was the instrument used to measure the variables in this study- academic emphasis, collective efficacy, trust in parents and students, and perceptions of instructional leadership. Some 1,327 teachers and staff members from 35 elementary schools serving grades PK-5 in the Norfolk Public School District in Virginia completed the survey. The subscales used to measure these variables included a 6 item subscale from the Organizational Health Inventory, which used a 5-

point Likert scale ranging from Never to Very Frequent; the Collective Teacher Belief Scale, which used a 9-point unidimensional scale ranging from Nothing to a Great Deal; nine items from the Omnibus T Scale, which used a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree; a six item subscale, chosen by NPS based on what they felt was pertinent to the needs of the school system, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Student achievement data were obtained from the Virginia Department of Education website. The data collected were the mean scaled scores for students in grades 3-5 in the areas of English and mathematics for each elementary school in the district. Student socioeconomic data were established through participation in the federal free and reduced priced lunch program for the 2008-2009 school year. These data were obtained from the Norfolk Public Schools Strategic Evaluation, Assessment, and Support Department in a document submitted to the Virginia Department of Education.

### **Findings**

The five research questions for this study were answered by analyzing data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package version 16.0. This study controlled for student socioeconomic status in an effort to determine the most accurate relationships and effects of academic optimism and instructional leadership. Data were aggregated to the school level.

#### **Research Question 1**

Do academic emphasis, teacher collective efficacy, and teacher trust in parents and students in this population covary to form an overall construct of academic

optimism? A factor analysis was conducted to determine whether the construct of academic optimism continued to operate as a single, unified construct. Using principal axis factoring, factor loadings ranged from .82 to .94. As reported in Table 3, academic press loaded strongly at .93, trust in parents and students loaded strongly at .94, and collective efficacy loaded strongly at .82. The single factor, academic optimism, with an Eigenvalue of 2.61, explained 86.9% of the total, or shared, variance. It is clear that all three factors came together to form a single construct.

Table 3

*Principal Factor Analysis Loadings for Academic Optimism*

	Factor 1
Trust in Parents and Students	.943
Academic Press	.932
Collective Efficacy	.810

**Research Question 2**

Do the six items in the measure of instructional leadership on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey covary to form the construct instructional leadership? A factor analysis was conducted to determine whether the six items used in this survey to define instructional leadership operated as a unified construct. Using principal axis factoring, factor loadings ranged from .88-.97. As reported in Table 4, the principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff loaded strongly at .97, the school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers

loaded strongly at .97, the school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues loaded strongly at .97, the principal promotes shared decision-making loaded strongly at .95, the school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom loaded strongly at .92, and the school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school loaded strongly at .88. The unified factor, instructional leadership, had an Eigenvalue of 5.45, explained 90.87% of the total, or shared, variance. It is fair to state that all six items pull together to form a unified construct defined as instructional leadership.

Table 4

*Principal Factor Analysis Loadings for Instructional Leadership*

	Factor 1
The principal promotes and nurtures leadership among staff	.973
The school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers	.971
The school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues	.969
The principal promotes shared decision-making	.946
The school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom	.924
The school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school	.876

**Research Question 3**

To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to academic optimism in their schools? Findings from the bivariate correlation indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between perceptions of instructional leadership and academic optimism ( $r = .402, p < .05$ ). These findings suggest that in schools where instructional leadership is perceived as positive, teachers press their students to meet high expectations, trust students and parents, and feel that they have the capability to work together to meet the needs of all students.

When controlling for SES, the relationship between perceptions of instructional leadership and academic optimism remained statistically significant ( $r = .475, p < .05$ ). Again, these findings suggest that in schools where there are positive perceptions of instructional leadership, teachers tend to be more optimistic about the focus of the school, their collective abilities to perform their jobs, and the quality of relationships with students and parents.

**Research Question 4**

To what extent is academic optimism related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status? Findings from the data indicated that there are significant relationships between academic optimism and student achievement in English and math, whether or not there are controls for student socioeconomic status (SES).

A bivariate correlation revealed a significant, positive correlation between academic optimism and student achievement in English ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ) and in math ( $r = .72, p < .01$ ). These findings suggest that in schools where teachers and staff are more

optimistic about academics, students experience higher rates of achievement. Table 5 contains bivariate correlations for academic optimism and English and math student achievement on the Virginia SOL assessments.

Table 5

*Bivariate Correlation Analysis of Academic Optimism and Student Achievement*

	2.	3.
1. Academic Optimism	.682**	.721**
2. English SOL Assessment		.898**
3. Math SOL Assessment		

\*\* $p < .01$

A partial correlation, controlling for student SES, revealed a moderate relationship between academic optimism and student achievement in English ( $r = .50$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and in math ( $r = .56$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These findings continue to suggest that optimistic learning environments foster increased academic achievement in students, even when controlling for SES. Table 6 includes partial correlations for academic optimism and English and math student achievement on the Virginia SOL assessments.

Table 6

*Partial Correlation Analysis of Academic Optimism and Student Achievement*

	2.	3.
1. Academic Optimism	.498*	.557*
2. English SOL Assessment		.790*
3. Math SOL Assessment		

\* $p < .05$ **Research Question 5**

To what extent are teacher perceptions of instructional leadership related to student achievement when controlling for socioeconomic status? Findings suggest there is not a statistically significant relationship between perceptions of instructional leadership and student achievement in English and math.

A bivariate correlation revealed there is not a statistically significant relationship between instructional leadership and student achievement in English ( $r = .147, p > .05$ ) and in math ( $r = .197, p > .05$ ). Table 7 contains bivariate correlations for instructional leadership and English and math student achievement on the Virginia SOL assessments.



Table 7

*Bivariate Correlation Analysis of Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement*

	2.	3.
1. Academic Optimism	.147	.197
2. English SOL Assessment		.898**
3. Math SOL Assessment		

\*\*p < .01

A partial correlation analysis of the data controlling for student SES revealed there is not a statistically significant correlation between instructional leadership and student achievement in English ( $r = .196, p > .05$ ) and math ( $r = .301, p > .05$ ). These findings suggest that instructional leadership does not have a direct relationship with student achievement. However, indirect relationships should be explored based on findings from research questions 3 and 4. Correlations for instructional leadership and English and math student achievement on the Virginia SOL assessments can be found in Table 8.

Table 8

*Partial Correlation Analysis of Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement*

	2.	3.
1. Instructional Leadership	.196	.301
2. English SOL Assessment		.790*
3. Math SOL Assessment		

\*  $p = < .05$

### Summary

This chapter presented the results from the statistical analyses performed to examine academic optimism, perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement. Correlational and factor analyses were utilized. Findings supported the existence of a unified construct of academic optimism and a unified construct of instructional leadership. Academic optimism and instructional leadership were moderately correlated. Academic optimism demonstrated a strong correlation with student achievement in English and math even when controlling for student SES; while instructional leadership did not demonstrate a statistically significant correlation with student achievement in English and math when controlling for student SES. The findings of this study, along with their implications for research and practice, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Summary and Discussion**

As the expectations for increased student academic success grows, the study of the relationships among academic optimism, instructional leadership, and student achievement provides important insights for educators and practical implications for school improvement. This chapter provides a summary of the research findings, a discussion of the results, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### **Introduction**

For decades, school researchers have worked to identify and examine school attributes that contribute to student achievement beyond that of socioeconomic status (SES). The subject of SES and its impact on student achievement has been a prevalent topic among researchers since the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) that identified SES as a dominant factor for student achievement. While SES continues to be a powerful factor (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; McGuigan & Hoy, 2005), new accountability standards and legislation from The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have pressed researchers and educators alike to examine factors within the schools' control that can be manipulated to positively impact student achievement.

Academic optimism, comprised of academic press, collective teacher efficacy, and trust in students and parents, has emerged from the literature as a unified construct linked to student achievement. It has been shown to positively correlate with student

achievement when controlling for SES (Hoy et al., 2006; McGuigan, 2005), suggesting that collective perceptions and attitudes can have a strong influence on performance.

Determining the effects of instructional leadership on student achievement has also become an important topic within the literature. In a review of instructional leadership and student achievement research, consistent evidence of a direct relationship between the two continues to be elusive, with most of the influence being indirect and mediated by other variables (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hoy et al., 2006).

According to Leithwood (2007), “successful school-level leaders have direct and positive influences on conditions in the school and classroom which in turn improve the learning of students” (p. 1). Smith and Hoy (2007) state, “Academic optimism can be learned and if it is, then increased success and better performance are likely to follow” (p. 565). Academic optimism is comprised of components that impact perceptions of people who work in a school building. If instructional leaders can become proficient in identifying and nurturing these perceptions, then it would stand to reason that instructional leadership could work in conjunction with academic optimism to positively impact student achievement.

This study examined the relationships among academic optimism, perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement in 35 urban elementary schools in Norfolk Public Schools in Virginia. Specifically, this study explored the relationship between academic optimism and instructional leadership, academic optimism and student achievement, and instructional leadership and student achievement while controlling for socioeconomic status. Student achievement was measured using scaled scores on the

third, fourth, and fifth grade Virginia Standards of Learning English and math assessments.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1, in which teacher perceptions of instructional leadership, academic optimism, and its three dimensions, and student achievement are related was partially confirmed by the findings in this study. Overall, the study yielded significant results related to academic optimism as a powerful construct that instructional leaders can nurture to increase student achievement.

The first part of this study examined the construct of academic optimism and confirmed that the three dimensions of academic press, collective efficacy, and trust in students and parents loaded on a single factor called academic optimism and operated as a single construct. These findings are consistent with prior research on academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, et al., 2006; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Wagner, 2008) and support Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk Hoy's theory that academic optimism is a latent construct in schools that is manifested through academic press, collective teacher efficacy, and teacher trust in students and parents.

This study also examined the six items used for the measure of teacher perceptions of instructional leadership on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey. The items were chosen by the research staff of the Norfolk Public Schools and were not based upon any particular framework or instrument. The study confirmed that the six items loaded on a single factor called instructional leadership. While the six items were derived from various sources, they are in line with many of the models of

instructional leadership found in the literature (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2004; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Murphy, 1990; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

The relationships between academic optimism and instructional leadership and academic optimism and student achievement were also explored in this study. Academic optimism correlated significantly with instructional leadership, even when controlling for student SES. In fact the partial correlation ( $r = .475, p < .05$ ) was higher than the bivariate correlation ( $r = .402, p < .05$ ) not controlling for student SES. This relationship suggests that instructional leaders influence factors such as academic press, collective teacher efficacy, and trust in students and parents.

In addition, the relationship between academic optimism and student achievement was also explored. Results from the bivariate correlational analysis confirmed a strong, positive correlation between academic optimism and student achievement in English ( $r = .68, p < .01$ ) and math ( $r = .72, p < .01$ ). In addition, a partial correlational analysis confirmed there is a moderate, positive relationship between academic optimism and student achievement in English ( $r = .50, p < .05$ ) and math ( $r = .56, p < .05$ ) when controlling for SES. These findings confirm other research studies on the construct (Hoy, Tarter, Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Wagner, 2008); academic optimism is a powerful school level variable with regard to student achievement. Most importantly, these findings are consistent with prior studies in urban elementary schools (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy 2000; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001) and suggest that the behavioral, cognitive, and affective components of

academic optimism in urban environments, where low socioeconomic status is highly relevant, become even more important to develop and sustain.

The final correlational analysis explored in this study examined the relationship between teacher perceptions of instructional leadership and student achievement in English and math. Correlations were not found to be statistically significant, even when controlling for student SES. This finding is consistent with the research on this topic that found the contributions of instructional leaders as indirect (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2004; Hallinger, 2005; Rice, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Much of the research suggests that while instructional leaders do have an effect on student achievement it is indirect at best. DiPaola and Smith (2008) stated “interpersonal relationships among teachers and between principals and teachers directly shape motivation and behavior” (p. 117). The impact of instructional leaders on student achievement is mediated via other variables.

The study confirmed the hypotheses that academic optimism and perceptions of instructional leadership are related and that academic optimism and student achievement are related. The study failed to confirm the hypothesis that perceptions of instructional leadership and student achievement are related. The findings are consistent with previous research on these variables.

### **Implications for Practice**

As the accountability measures required by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act continue to increase each year, schools feel the pressure to close the achievement gap among students. Researchers and school leaders are searching for factors within their

control to nurture and positively impact student achievement. According to Deal and Kennedy (1983) organizational culture has much to do with the productivity of schools, and school leaders play a large part in shaping the school environment. According to this study, academic optimism is a powerful construct in the school environment. Findings suggest that instructional leaders need to define and nurture the three dimensions of academic optimism to create a school culture to support teachers as they work with students to increase their levels of achievement regardless of socioeconomic status. Understanding the relationships and impacts of academic optimism and instructional leadership on student achievement for all students can guide the efforts of our schools and school leaders to improve the educational outcomes for students regardless of the obstacles being faced.

### **Academic Optimism**

*Academic optimism was found to have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement in both English and math. When teachers have high expectations for student performance, perceive they can make a difference in the educational lives of their students, and trust in their students and parents, schools are more likely to have higher levels of student achievement. Academic optimism and perceptions of instructional leadership were also significantly related. Given the significance of academic optimism in this study, its strong correlation to student achievement, and its relationship with instructional leadership, school administrators would be wise to invest energy and resources to create a school environment that fosters positive teacher attitudes and behaviors that in turn promote student achievement.*



The results of this study support the argument that what instructional leaders do each day makes a difference, albeit indirectly, that positively impacts student achievement. Instructional leaders are responsible for their schools, how they are structured, and how they operate. There are number of ways instructional leaders can organize and manage their school environments to increase academic optimism.

**Academic emphasis.** Schools around the country share one common goal for students: learning and achievement. Academic emphasis is critical in improving academic scores in urban elementary schools (Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000). Schools that have high levels of academic emphasis are structured in ways that make learning a priority for teachers and students.

Instructional leaders can set the tone for their schools by emphasizing academic success for all students and making that the primary goal. Collaboratively working with teachers, instructional leaders can set high expectations for students that include academic rigor and a challenging curriculum. Insisting that teachers set high goals for their students and rewarding teachers and students for their hard work and academic accomplishments throughout the school year are important aspects of keeping the focus on this goal. Reviewing achievement data, targeting student needs, and making the appropriate resources available to teachers shows them that the teaching and learning process is being monitored and adjusted. Maintaining an orderly environment free of distractions, protecting academic learning time, such as assemblies not related to instruction, announcements, parent visits, and cumbersome transitions in the school day allows teachers to use instructional time wisely and confirms that what they are doing is

an important job. Instructional leaders visibly monitor academic emphasis through frequent classroom visits, provide feedback to teachers, and evaluate their performance to ensure the success of the learning environment. Visibility of the instructional leader in classrooms and hallways lets teachers know that the quality of the teaching environment is important.

**Collective efficacy.** Bandura defined efficacy beliefs as “future oriented judgments about capabilities to organize and accomplish courses of action needed to produce the results desired for specific situations or contexts (1997, p. 271). In schools that have high levels of collective teacher efficacy, teachers believe that students can be taught and can achieve. Bandura (1997) discussed four sources for shaping efficacy beliefs. The first source includes mastery experiences. Teachers experience successes and failures in their classrooms on a daily basis. Teachers build confidence in their abilities by consistently overcoming failures and understanding over time of what constitutes success. Instructional leaders can help teachers analyze and reflect on lessons and identify their successes in their teaching. Instructional leaders can also work with teachers to look at overall school achievements through analyses of achievement scores, student attendance, and other relevant data. Emphasizing and celebrating the successes builds collective confidence in teachers who will be more likely to set high academic goals for their students and work with their students to meet those goals.

Vicarious experiences are the second sources of building efficacy beliefs. Teachers communicate with one another about various topics, and many listen to the stories of their colleagues in the lounge or copy room. Hearing about the successes of

their colleagues is an important part of building efficacious behavior. Instructional leaders can foster this by spotlighting an instructional technique or strategy observed in a classroom each week or organizing a time for grade levels to share with one another. Vicarious learning experiences also occur through modeling and observing what others are successfully doing. Instructional leaders can support this process by asking teachers to visit two colleagues each quarter to observe what they are doing in their classrooms or asking a new teacher to observe a successful tenured teacher. Observing and sharing successes helps teachers learn from colleagues.

Social persuasion is another source of building efficacy beliefs. This source has much to do with the feedback provided to teachers. Verbal boosts through specific, positive feedback strengthen teachers' beliefs that they have what it takes to do a good job. If teachers feel they can master a task they are more likely to put forth more effort to accomplish that task rather than dwelling on personal shortcomings. Professional development sessions, working together to analyze data, planning lessons, or hearing on the news how educators influence students can all be powerful sources of persuasion. Instructional leaders can increase the impact of this source by acknowledging successes around them, giving specific feedback to teachers, or thanking them for their efforts. The more successes a staff perceives the more capable they are likely to feel and behave.

A final source of building efficacy is affective states. Organizations are a group of individuals that react to environmental stimuli around them. This may be stress, anxiety, or excitement. Instructional leaders must model for teachers how to behave when setbacks occur. If standardized scores come back lower than anticipated, it is up to the

instructional leader to communicate a belief that teachers have the ability to be successful. If everyone works hard and continues to analyze areas for improvement goals can be achieved. There is always an element of healthy anxiety in education, but modeling how to use that in a positive fashion can create collective efficacy in teachers that will allow them to tolerate and react to pressures and stressors in a way that will not have negative consequences on students and achievement.

**Trust in students and parents.** Benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness are the five facets of trust that work together and depend on one another. Trust is reciprocal in nature. It is a construct that involves building mutual trust among all parties and promotes relationship building (Goddard, et al., 2001; Hoy, 2002). In schools where teachers trust their students and parents, students tend to achieve at higher levels even when controlling for SES. Teachers can build trust with students by setting clear expectations, developing class procedures as a group, and promoting mutual respect. Sharing those expectations and procedures with parents, welcoming parents into the school environment, and explaining instructional processes can build trust between home and school as well.

Instructional leaders should nurture teacher trust in students and parents. An instructional leader's attitudes and behaviors toward students and parents can be a powerful model for teachers. Using care when talking about parents and interacting with parents sets the tone of respect and trust. The handling of discipline issues in a respectful and compassionate fashion shows teachers that students and parents can be trusted to understand and meet expectations. Instructional leaders can continue to foster these ideals

with teachers by monitoring communication that goes home (i.e. newsletters) or assisting them with reflecting on student and parent interactions. Joint problem-solving, to foster healthy feelings about students and parents, is an important skill to develop and support trusting relationships. Instructional leaders can also help teachers build trust through the planning of activities before, during, or after the instructional day that form cooperative relationships between school and home to increase support for student achievement and successes in school.

### **Instructional Leadership**

As educational practitioners, school principals want to believe that instructional leaders have a direct impact on student achievement. While this study did not confirm this relationship, it does advance our thinking on what instructional leaders can do to contribute to an increase in student achievement. In fact, what instructional leaders can do through the promotion of academic optimism, an important school characteristic related to student achievement, can make a powerful, indirect contribution to student achievement (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). The construct of academic optimism and its components of academic press, collective efficacy, and trust in students and parents can be influenced by the practices of the school's instructional leader. The six items from the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey used to operationalize instructional leadership in this study held together as a single construct. The instructional leadership behaviors identified included:

- the school's administrator actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school,
- the school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues,
- the school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom,
- the principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff,
- the principal promotes shared decision-making, and
- the school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.

These items align with the previously defined models of instructional leadership in Chapter 2. The findings from this study and the literature inform instructional leaders on important practices that demonstrate instructional leadership and can be utilized to foster academic optimism in the school environment. Tables 9-12 contain the 6 items from the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey that formed the unified construct of instructional leadership at the top of each table. The elements from each instructional leadership model reviewed in Chapter 2 are located under the 6 items in individual tables to visually compare how instructional leadership in this study align with models used in previous studies.

Table 9

*Comparison of the 6 Items on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey and Elements of Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) Instructional Leadership Model*

<i>The school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school.</i>	<i>The school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues.</i>	<i>The school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom.</i>	<i>The principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff.</i>	<i>The principal promotes shared decision-making.</i>	<i>The school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervising and evaluating instruction</li> <li>• Enforcing academic standards</li> <li>• Providing incentives for teachers</li> <li>• Providing incentives for students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting instructional time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring student progress</li> <li>• Maintaining high visibility</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing school goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating school goals</li> <li>• Coordinating curriculum</li> <li>• Promoting professional development</li> </ul>

Table 10  
*Comparison of the 6 Items on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey and  
 Elements of Murphy's (1990) Instructional Leadership Model*

<i>The school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school.</i>	<i>The school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues.</i>	<i>The school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom.</i>	<i>The principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff.</i>	<i>The principal promotes shared decision-making.</i>	<i>The school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting quality instruction</li> <li>• Supervising and evaluating instruction</li> <li>• Establishing positive expectations and standards</li> <li>• Providing incentives for teachers and students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocating and protecting instructional time</li> <li>• Creating a safe, orderly learning environment</li> <li>• Securing outside resources to support school goals</li> <li>• Forming links between home and school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring student progress</li> <li>• Maintaining high visibility</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing school goals</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement</li> <li>• Developing staff collaboration and cohesion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating school goals</li> <li>• Coordinating the curriculum</li> <li>• Promoting professional development</li> </ul>



Table 11

*Comparison of the 6 Items on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey and Elements of Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy's (2004) Instructional Leadership Model*

<i>The school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school.</i>	<i>The school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues.</i>	<i>The school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom.</i>	<i>The principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff.</i>	<i>The principal promotes shared decision-making.</i>	<i>The school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing praise and feedback to teachers, students, and the community on academic performances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the instructional time of the school is not interrupted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visible in the school</li> <li>• Talking with students and teachers</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working collaboratively with staff to define, communicate and use shared goals of the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages teacher to learn more about student achievement through data analysis</li> <li>• Provides professional development opportunities that are aligned to school goals</li> <li>• Provides professional literature and resources to teachers</li> </ul>

Table 12

*Comparison of the 6 Items on the Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey and Elements of Waters, Marzano, and McNulty's (2003) 21 Leadership Responsibilities*

<i>The school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school.</i>	<i>The school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues.</i>	<i>The school's administration knows what is going on in my classroom.</i>	<i>The principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff.</i>	<i>The principal promotes shared decision-making.</i>	<i>The school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum, instruction, and assessment</li> <li>• Focus</li> <li>• Contingent rewards</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Outreach</li> <li>• Affirmation</li> <li>• Monitors/Evaluates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Optimizer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visibility</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Situational awareness</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Input</li> <li>• Ideals/Beliefs</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of curriculum, instructional assessment</li> <li>• Change agent</li> <li>• Intellectual stimulation</li> </ul>

Each of the models included elements that can be matched with the six items that make up the construct of instructional leadership used for this study, but it is important to note that one of the six items, the principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff, did not align with any of the elements contained in the other models. However, by promoting shared decision-making and taking a personal interest in the professional development of teachers, items that align nicely with other frameworks, it can be argued that instructional leaders are promoting and nurturing leadership in others. Instructional

leaders are responsible for how they organize, manage, and lead their schools. Based on the instructional leadership models and the operationalized definition of instructional leadership used in this study, the role of an instructional leader in improving student achievement is managed through the teachers. All of the elements sorted and listed in Tables 9-12 are supportive in nature and may be used to facilitate an environment of academic success.

Instructional leaders can use the elements of promoting quality instruction, supervising and evaluating instruction, establishing positive expectations and standards, providing incentives, monitoring student progress, and maintaining high visibility, and actively monitoring the quality of teaching in classrooms to build a climate of high academic expectations in which teachers collaborate to create an emphasis on achievement for all. The elements of communicating school goals, promoting professional development opportunities, analyzing data, and providing staff with relevant literature can be used by instructional leaders to develop a collective confidence in teachers to carry out instruction and push through adversity to meet the challenges of their students. Finally, instructional leaders can use the elements of shared decision-making, the development of goals, the protection of instructional time, creating a safe and orderly environment, securing outside resources, and making that home-school connection to foster teacher trust in students and parents and create a collaborative learning environment. Using the elements in the instructional leadership models can assist a principal in increasing the academic optimism of a school by working diligently

to enhance the three variables of academic emphasis, collective teacher efficacy, and teacher trust in students and parents.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Schools are dynamic institutions. The quest to understand all the variables in these complex organizations will continue. This study adds to the emerging research on academic optimism and ways an instructional leader can foster higher levels of student achievement in their schools. The principals' role is significant, especially in how they influence teachers to create an environment of success. Additional research on academic optimism and its relationship with instructional leadership is encouraged to further understand the effects of leadership behaviors on student achievement.

The research on the relationships among academic optimism, teacher perceptions of instructional leadership, and student achievement should be conducted to account for differences in state standards and assessments, grade levels, and socioeconomic environments. This was a convenience sample and the results are limited and cannot be generalized. Future studies may be able to provide additional data on how these constructs operate in different school contexts and environments.

Academic optimism is an emerging construct that is proving to be a powerful force for schools as they seek to improve student achievement. The majority of studies on this topic are quantitative in nature. It may be beneficial to conduct qualitative research through the use of interviews and focus groups. Discussions could pinpoint specific behaviors that may not be captured within the questions on a survey and allow researchers to analyze how the variables operate across different settings within a school

(i.e., gifted and talented, exceptional education, Title I) that increase academic optimism. Examining behaviors associated with academic optimism and how they may be defined differently in different school environments, such as high socioeconomic status versus low socioeconomic status schools, may prove to be valuable for instructional leaders and school divisions as they assign instructional leaders to buildings.

An analysis of instructional leadership models and their relationships to academic optimism may help identify the essential qualities of instructional leadership necessary to impact student achievement. As noted earlier, the instructional leadership models examined identified several essential elements that aligned with one another. The essential elements of instructional leadership included an administrator who actively monitors the quality of teaching in the school, an administrator who is pro-active, an administrator who knows what is going on in the classroom, an administrator who promotes shared decision-making, and an administrator who takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers. The instructional leadership models failed to align with regard to promoting and nurturing leadership in others. Future research could define the importance of this in the relationship between instructional leadership and academic optimism and may be examined in relationship to shared or distributed leadership.

Studies should be conducted that examine how changes in the instructional leaders of schools, by replacing principals, impact academic optimism. As a new leader takes over, does the culture of academic optimism increase or decrease? Does the

experience level of an instructional leader play a part in this? How does this impact long-term student achievement?

Examining academic optimism and comparing how it is perceived and reported by teachers and principals could make a valuable contribution. It may be of substantial value for scholars to compare administrator perceptions to stakeholder perceptions to determine if there is some consistency, or if particular areas need to be addressed for improvement. Expanding the population surveyed to include students and parents could allow teachers and instructional leaders to identify areas that are congruent and areas that may need to be addressed, which could prove to be beneficial for improving academic optimism in the learning environment.

### **Final Thoughts**

Academic optimism is an emerging theme in the research and challenges researchers and practitioners to develop new and innovative ways to create a climate and culture that facilitates the job of teachers to positively impact student achievement. If instructional leaders can increase academic optimism, they can indirectly and positively impact student achievement. While socioeconomic status continues to be an obstacle to be overcome, there is much that instructional leaders can do to create a culture that values intellectual pursuits and academic excellence and increases student achievement within the school environment. Instructional leaders must act in ways that empower teachers through emphasizing academic achievement while building collective efficacy and trust in students and parents. Facilitating and motivating others can lead to student and school success.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey 2008-2009


## Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey 2008-09

School	Years Teaching
(0) (0) (0)	( ) 1st year
(1) (1) (1)	( ) 1-2 years
(2) (2) (2)	( ) 3-5 years
(3) (3) (3)	( ) 6-10 years
(4) (4) (4)	( ) 11-15 years
(5) (5) (5)	( ) 16-20 years
(6) (6) (6)	( ) 21+ years
(7) (7) (7)	
(8) (8) (8)	
(9) (9) (9)	


*Marking Instructions*


- Use a No. 2 pencil only
- Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt tip pens
- Make solid marks that fill the response completely
- Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change
- Make no stray marks on this form.

**CORRECT**



**INCORRECT**





USE A NO. 2 PENCIL

	Nothing	Very little	Some degree	Quite a bit	A great deal				
<b>Please indicate your opinion on each item below by selecting a number for each item</b>									
<b>How much can you do to</b>									
A1 Control disruptive behavior in the classroom	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A2 Motivate students who show low interest in school work	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A3 Calm a student who is disruptive or noisy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A4 Help your students value learning	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A5 Craft good questions for your students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A6 Have students follow classroom rules	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A7 Have students believe they can do well in school work	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A8 Establish a classroom management system with each group of students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A9 Use a variety of assessment strategies	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A10 Provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A11 Assist families in helping their children do well in school	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A12 Implement alternative teaching strategies in your classroom	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
<b>How much can teachers in your school do to</b>									
A13 Produce meaningful student learning	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A14 Get students to believe they can do well in school work	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A15 Make expectations clear about appropriate student behavior	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A16 Establish rules and procedures that facilitate learning	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A17 Help students master complex content	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A18 Promote deep understanding of academic concepts	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A19 Help students think critically	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A20 Foster student creativity	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A21 Help students feel safe while they are at school	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A22 Control disruptive behavior	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A23 Get students to follow school rules	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
A24 Respond to defiant students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

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**Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey 2008-09**  
(page 2)

Please indicate your opinion on each item below by selecting a number for each item ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (6) Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
<b>In your school:</b>						
B1 Students care about each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
B2 Teachers typically look out for each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
B3 Teachers have faith in the integrity of the school's administration	1	2	3	4	5	6
B4 Even in difficult situations, teachers can depend on each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
B5 The school's administration typically act in the best interests of the teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
B6 Teachers can rely on the school's administration	1	2	3	4	5	6
B7 Teachers trust each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
B8 Teachers can count on parental support	1	2	3	4	5	6
B9 Teachers think that most of the parents do a good job	1	2	3	4	5	6
B10 Teachers trust the school's administration	1	2	3	4	5	6
B11 Teachers are open with each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
B12 Students can be counted on to do their work	1	2	3	4	5	6
B13 Parents are reliable in their commitments	1	2	3	4	5	6
B14 The school's administration does not tell teachers what is really going on	1	2	3	4	5	6
B15 The school's administration does not show concern for teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
B16 Teachers have faith in the integrity of their colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6
B17 Teachers trust the parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
B18 Teachers are suspicious of each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
B19 When teachers tell you something you can believe it	1	2	3	4	5	6
B20 Teachers do their jobs well	1	2	3	4	5	6
B21 Teachers believe that students are competent learners	1	2	3	4	5	6
B22 Teachers are suspicious of most of the school's administration actions	1	2	3	4	5	6
B23 Teachers believe what parents tell them	1	2	3	4	5	6
B24 The principal is competent in doing his or her job	1	2	3	4	5	6
B25 Teachers trust their students	1	2	3	4	5	6

To what extent is each of the following a problem at your school:	Not at all	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Great Deal
C1 Physical conflicts among students (fighting)	1	2	3	4	5
C2 Gang activity	1	2	3	4	5
C3 Disorder in classrooms	1	2	3	4	5
C4 Disorder in hallways	1	2	3	4	5
C5 Threats of violence toward teachers	1	2	3	4	5
C6 Students threatening other students	1	2	3	4	5
C7 Students intimidating other students	1	2	3	4	5
C8 Bullying	1	2	3	4	5
C9 Students in this school fear other students	1	2	3	4	5
C10 Students in this school make fun of other students	1	2	3	4	5

< Next Page >

Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey 2008-09  
(page 3)

Please indicate your opinion on each item below by selecting a number for each item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
<b>In your School</b>					
D1 Our school makes an effort to inform the community about our goals and achievements	1	2	3	4	5
D2 Our school is able to marshal community support when needed	1	2	3	4	5
D3 The interactions between faculty members are cooperative	1	2	3	4	5
D4 Teachers respect the professional competence of their colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
D5 The school sets high standards for academic performance	1	2	3	4	5
D6 Students respect others who get good grades	1	2	3	4	5
D7 The principal is friendly and approachable	1	2	3	4	5
D8 The principal puts suggestions made by the faculty into operation	1	2	3	4	5
D9 Parents and other community members are included on planning committees	1	2	3	4	5
D10 Community members are responsive to requests for participation	1	2	3	4	5
D11 Teachers help and support each other	1	2	3	4	5
D12 Teachers in this school exercise professional judgment	1	2	3	4	5
D13 Teachers are committed to helping students	1	2	3	4	5
D14 Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school	1	2	3	4	5
D15 Students try hard to improve on previous work	1	2	3	4	5
D16 The principal explores all sides of topics and admits that other opinions exist	1	2	3	4	5
D17 The principal treats all faculty members as his or her equal	1	2	3	4	5
D18 Teachers accomplish their jobs with enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5
D19 Teachers "go the extra mile" with their students	1	2	3	4	5
D20 Teachers provide strong social support for colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
D21 The learning environment is orderly and serious	1	2	3	4	5
D22 Students seek extra work so they can get good grades	1	2	3	4	5
D23 The principal is willing to make changes	1	2	3	4	5
D24 The principal lets the faculty know what is expected of them	1	2	3	4	5
D25 The principal maintains definite standards of performance	1	2	3	4	5
D26 Community members attend meetings to stay informed about our school	1	2	3	4	5
D27 Organized community groups (e.g., PTA, PTO) meet regularly to discuss school issues	1	2	3	4	5
D28 School people are responsive to the needs and concerns expressed by community members	1	2	3	4	5
D29 Teachers help students on their own time	1	2	3	4	5
D30 Teachers take initiative to introduce themselves to substitutes and assist them	1	2	3	4	5
D31 Teachers waste a lot of class time	1	2	3	4	5
D32 Teachers volunteer to sponsor extra-curricular activities	1	2	3	4	5
D33 Teacher committees in this school work productively	1	2	3	4	5
D34 Teachers make innovative suggestions to improve the overall quality of our system	1	2	3	4	5
D35 Teachers voluntarily help new teachers	1	2	3	4	5
D36 Teachers volunteer to serve on committees	1	2	3	4	5
D37 Teachers arrive to work and meetings on time	1	2	3	4	5
D38 Teachers begin class promptly and use class time effectively	1	2	3	4	5
D39 Teachers give colleagues advanced notice of changes in schedule or routine	1	2	3	4	5
D40 Teachers give an excessive amount of busy work	1	2	3	4	5

**Norfolk Public Schools Teacher Climate Survey: 2008-09 (page 4)**

Please indicate your opinion on each item below by selecting a number for each item					
	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
E1 Faculty morale is good at this school	1	2	3	4	5
E2 I am satisfied with my job at this school	1	2	3	4	5
E3 I feel safe while at school	1	2	3	4	5
E4 My school is kept in good condition	1	2	3	4	5
E5 Parents cooperate with teachers in addressing the academic performance and discipline of their children	1	2	3	4	5
E6 I have planning time at least three days a week	1	2	3	4	5
E7 Student absenteeism is a problem in my clas(es)	1	2	3	4	5
E8 Students feel safe in this school	1	2	3	4	5
E9 The school's administration actively monitors the quality of teaching in this school	1	2	3	4	5
E10 The school's administration is pro-active and addresses support issues	1	2	3	4	5
E11 The school's administration knows what's going on in my classroom	1	2	3	4	5
E12 The principal promotes and nurtures leadership among the staff	1	2	3	4	5
E13 The principal promotes shared decision-making	1	2	3	4	5
E14 The school's administration takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers	1	2	3	4	5
E15 The teacher salary structure and benefits are equitable	1	2	3	4	5

How many teachers in your school:						
	<i>None</i>	<i>Some</i>	<i>About half</i>	<i>Most</i>	<i>Nearly all</i>	<i>All</i>
F1 He/She maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their classroom	1	2	3	4	5	6
F2 Take responsibility for improving the school	1	2	3	4	5	6
F3 Feel responsible that all students learn	1	2	3	4	5	6
F4 Really care about each other	1	2	3	4	5	6
F5 How many of the parents of your students support your teaching efforts	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Vita

Angela May Allen

Birthdate:	November 11, 1974	
Birthplace:	Richmond, Virginia	
Education:	2004-2011	The College of William and Mary Williamsburg, Virginia Doctor of Education
	1997-1999	University of Richmond Richmond, Virginia Master in Teaching
	1992-1996	Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, Virginia Bachelor of Science
Professional Experience	2009-	Elementary School Principal Henrico County Public Schools Henrico, Virginia
	2005-2009	Elementary School Assistant Principal Hanover County Public Schools Hanover, Virginia
	1999-2005	Elementary School Teacher Henrico County Public Schools Henrico, Virginia