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# Faculty sense of academic optimism and its relationship to students' achievement in well performing high schools

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*College of William & Mary - School of Education*

# FACULTY SENSE OF ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN WELL PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS

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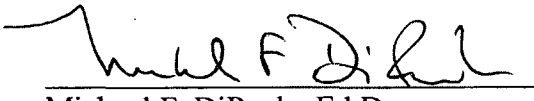
Approved May 2013 by



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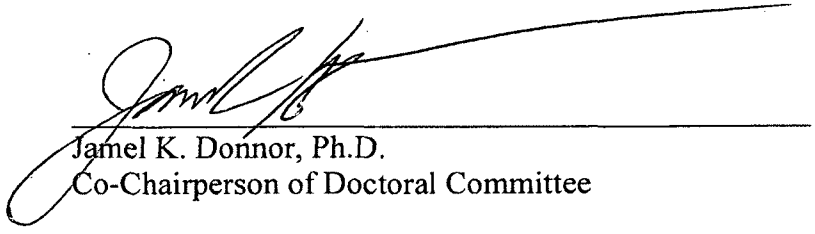

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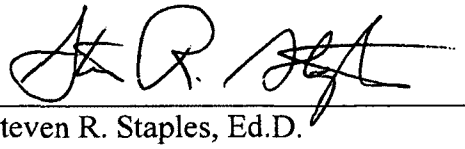

Steven R. Staples, Ed.D.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my late grandparents,

William Henry and Lucille Cromartie.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My mother, Josephine Johnson, taught my brother and me to only see the possibilities. She did this not so much through words, but practice. During my childhood, I watched my mother work to overcome seemingly insurmountable circumstances, prevailing each time a little better than the time before. Though a remarkable student in her own right, she left school near the end of her eleventh grade year to birth me; she never returned. However, she remains the best teacher I have ever had. I thank my grandmother, Myrtle Lee Johnson, for teaching me the significance of hard, dedicated, and purposeful work. Completing a doctoral program, specifically the dissertation, is not happenstance. Rather, it is the result of persistent ambition, focus, and commitment. I honestly show credit to my mother and grandmother for demonstrating the importance of these attributes throughout my life.

I am thankful to and for my daughters, Jamila (12), Kaniya (9), and Layla (4). I remember talking about my doctoral program with them as I was beginning to take a couple courses each semester. Jamila, who is very inquisitive asked, "So, does that mean people are going to call you doctor?" I replied, "Yes. I guess some people will." Jamila then asked, "Will you work in a hospital?" I conveyed that I would not be that kind of doctor, and almost immediately, Kaniya, at the time four years old and far more direct said, "If you don't work in a hospital, then I'm not calling you doctor... I'll just call you dad!" The five years since have brought tremendous change, and there have been many times when my concurrent pursuits of this degree and career advancement have caused me to miss rehearsals, recitals, and competitions. I am so glad that each of you still affectionately calls me dad.

Elizabeth, thank you for making the last four years the best of my life. You have renewed my esteem in possibilities and have been by my side through the greatest adversity. Your enthusiastic spirit and unswerving support afforded me the strength to continue my studies, research, and writing during times when I otherwise could not have. I wholeheartedly appreciate your partnership, and I am blessed to have you in my life. You always tease me for merging clichés or sayings, and I will do it again by mentioning that laughter is both the best medicine and the shortest distance between two people. I am eternally grateful that you laugh with me. I will love you forever and then one more day.

My dissertation committee is the greatest ever assembled! Dr. Michael DiPaola, you have not only been instrumental in my studies, but also my career in educational leadership. I highly value your perspective and thank you for keeping me on this path. One of the first things you taught me as a budding graduate student in 2001 was that if I was to stand a chance in this business, I would have to "get a thicker skin". That wisdom has benefitted me in ways far too abundant to outline here, and I thank you for it. Dr. Jamel Donnor, your insightful emphasis of qualitative research allowed me to see it as a method better aligned with my skill sets. In a very short time, I have found you to be a distinguished strategist who has supported me to see around the corners and ask the right questions to yield richer data. The dissertation was my first developed endeavor with qualitative research, and I appreciate you for your coaching along the way. Lastly, I have learned a tremendous deal from Dr. Steve Staples who has extended many rich, "real time" experiences over the years. It is rare that a graduate student actually gets to experience his professor as his boss, and I was able to jubilantly have that experience for

a short while. You are a legend in the field, and I acknowledge my fortune to have been able to learn from you.

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the organizational characteristics and behaviors that contribute to sustaining a culture of academic optimism as a mechanism of student achievement. While there is a developing research base identifying both the individual elements of academic optimism as well as the academic optimism construct itself as contributors to student achievement, little information exists to assist school leaders in identifying specific organizational practices that sustain collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and families. This study employs case study methodology to investigate faculties' interpretations of academic optimism by examining the organizational and instructional practices at three well performing Virginia high schools. Gathered data includes information obtained through direct interviews with 18 (six at each site) faculty members, observations from 12 (four at each site) classrooms, and a review of each school's vision or mission statements, improvement initiatives, and course offerings and enrollments.



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FACULTY SENSE OF ACADEMIC OPTIMISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN WELL PERFORMING HIGH SCHOOLS

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

*Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.*

~Gilbert K. Chesterton

The launching of Sputnik in 1957 symbolized far more than the Soviet Union's successful catapulting of a satellite into space, it propelled one of the largest, most significant reform movements in American education (Ravitch, 1983; Skinner, 1984; Dean, 1997; Bybee, 1997). At the time, American scientists and engineers warned that The Cold War was fought more with slide rules rather than rifles (Dean, 1997), and the race into space proved to be a critical battleground. Responding to increasing concerns that the Russians had surpassed Americans in mathematics and science expertise, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act of 1958 fostering the study of science, mathematics, and foreign language and allocating $1 billion to finance student loans, scholarships, and enhanced equipment (Dean, 1997; Lappan, 1997). Prior to the Soviet Union's success of Sputnik, education was almost exclusively a local enterprise, but soon after the satellite's launching American teachers faced a national, more patriotic challenge to increase and sustain student achievement (Bybee, 1997; Dean, 1997).

Although public schools remained segregated at the time, the challenge was adopted by all Americans and transcended geography and race (Dean, 1997). Shirley Malcolm, a student at The Lewis School in Birmingham recalled, "Here I was, a black kid in a segregated school that was under-resourced — Sputnik kind of crossed the barrier. All of a sudden everybody was talking about it, and science was above the fold

in the newspaper, and my teachers went to institutes and really got [students] engaged. It was just a time of incredible intensity and attention to science" (Dean, 1997, p. 2).

Less than a decade after Sputnik and 21 years into the Cold War, the Equality of Educational Opportunity (EEO) report, most commonly referred to as the Coleman Report, was released (Coleman, et. al., 1966) sparking additional discussion on the overall effectiveness of America's public schools and introducing debate which remains thematic in contemporary educational practice. Unlike Sputnik, which unified Americans regarding educational purpose, the EEO report indicated that a school's organizational characteristics contributed little toward variance in student achievement identifying students' familial background and socioeconomic status as the single greatest contributors to academic success (1966). While performance gaps between ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups have narrowed significantly since the release of the Coleman Report, disparate academic performance between subgroups remains substantial leaving both practitioners and researchers seeking the components of consistent student achievement. More recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which emphasizes accountability of school outcomes, established annual objectives that must be met by all subgroups for numeracy and literacy and, in premise, effectively works to eliminate discrepancies in achievement. Interestingly, the legislation holds at its core opportunities for school choice (e.g., charter schools) and conditional federal funding.

Research from the 1970s and 1980s began to illuminate for the first time in the history of American public education that "we had not known all we needed to in order to teach all those whom we chose to teach" (Edmonds, 1979, p.16). In other words, an understanding of poverty and urbanicity was evolving as a critical component to

instruction. George Weber's (1971) study of four effective inner-city schools was explicitly intended to defy the findings of Coleman and other researchers who had concluded that low achievement by poor children was the result of a distinctive set of disabilities and characteristics associated with their low socioeconomic status. Weber (1971) found that the most common characteristics of the four schools studied included strong principal leadership, communication of high expectations for all students, an orderly and pleasant learning environment, and a strong emphasis on reading skill acquisition reinforced by careful and frequent evaluation of student progress. Further research suggested that in addition to the variables identified by Weber in 1971, universal instructional focus, routine evaluation of instructional quality, and the expectation that every student will demonstrate minimum mastery of all basic skills such as reading are all critical contributors to sustaining student achievement (Austin, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983).

Coincidentally, *A Nation at Risk,* a report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), was released suggesting the shortcomings of America's schools and presenting information that indicated that high school students' performance on standardized tests was significantly lower than it had been 26 years prior at the launch of Sputnik. The same year *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future* (Goodlad, 1983) and *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America* (Boyer, 1983) were released sustaining alarm and increasing the call for American educational reform. Although numerous studies have since defied the findings of *A Nation at Risk* and other research of that time, the reports significantly wounded perceptions of our country's public schools.

Meanwhile, the context of schooling continued to evolve, further emphasizing the social and organizational characteristics that influence students' learning beyond their socioeconomic status (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). In addition to strong instructional leadership, effective schools research posits that other key climate components such as the pervasive focus on academics, holding high expectations for students, and maintaining a safe and orderly schooling environment are vital to achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Wagner and DiPaola (2011) assert that among nearly all the results of early studies on effective schools, several commonly-recognized organizational properties have emerged which consistently correlate with sustained academic achievement: organizational citizenship behavior of teachers; collective teacher efficacy; faculty trust in students and parents; and academic emphasis, also referred to as academic press. The latter three properties: collective teacher efficacy, faculty trust in students and parents, and academic emphasis create the singular, latent construct of academic optimism characterizing a school's collective level of confidence that all students can be successful (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Wagner, 2008; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011).

*Conceptual Framework*

Symbolic interactionism, originating from theorists George Herbert Meade and Charles Horton Cooley, is a significant sociological perspective that emphasizes micro-scale social interaction regarding patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication and interpretation (Blumer, 1969; Griffin, 2006; Charon, 2007). Interactionists' research employs qualitative methods to examine social interaction and an individual's sense of self deeming people and society as inseparable for two basic reasons: both are created

through social interaction, and neither can be understood without the other (Charon, 2007). Blumer (1969) developed the following as premises of the perspective:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things;
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and society; and
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the individual dealing with the things he/she encounters.

Hoy, Tarter, and Woolfolk-Hoy (2006) noted that, "efficacy beliefs are central mechanisms in human agency, the intentional pursuit of a course of action. Individuals and groups are unlikely to initiate action without a positive sense of efficacy" (p. 428). Efficacy operates by influencing cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes, and positive efficacy beliefs affect whether an individual or organization is optimistic (Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000, 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Hoy & Tarter, 2011).

Social psychologist Albert Bandura (1989; 1993) postulated self-efficacy as an individual's belief that he/she is capable of performing in a certain manner to achieve specified goals. Self-efficacy as a concept is rooted in Bandura's *Social Foundations of Thought and Action's* (1986) social cognitive theory describing the human experience as one of action, forethought, intentionality, and choice. Bandura's research concluded that people develop beliefs about their abilities to perform at a given level of competence, and ultimately those beliefs impact the types of individual goals set, how long they will persist when faced with difficulty, how resilient they will be when confronted by failure,

and the level of frustration or stress they experience in coping with challenging situations (Barling & Abel, 1983; Bandura & Cervone, 1986; Bandura, 1988b, 1993). Bandura believed that outcome expectations and efficacy expectations shaped individual motivation qualifying outcome expectations as individual judgments about the likely consequences of a particular action or behavior in a certain situation. Further, efficacy represents an individual's genuine belief in his or her ability to achieve a certain level of performance within that specified situation. (Bandura, 1989, 1997, 2001). It is important to point out that while efficacy expectations and outcome expectations are interrelated, Bandura also believed that they could be differentiated or exclusive (Bandura, 1988b, 1993; Guskey & Passaro, 1993). Essentially an individual may believe that specific behaviors will yield a certain outcome (outcome expectancy) but may not have the belief or confidence in his ability to carry out the actions necessary to achieving the targeted outcome (efficacy expectancy).

In education, the tenets of self-efficacy have been applied to develop teacher efficacy, defined by Guskey and Passaro (1993) as "a teacher's belief or conviction that he/she can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated" (p.3). For Ross (1994), teacher efficacy is the extent to which teachers believe their work will have a positive effect on students' achievement, which more closely connects to Bandura's two-concept model of efficacy expectation (teacher esteem) and outcome expectation (student achievement). Consequently, Hoy & Woolfolk (1993) proclaim that teacher efficacy has two branches or dimensions, general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. General teaching efficacy declares the extent to which teachers believe it is possible to impact the academic achievement of

students. General teaching efficacy typically exists at higher levels when teachers embrace the idea that they can overcome obstacles such as low socioeconomic status (SES), waning parental involvement, and institutional bureaucracy to support students to performing. Personal teacher efficacy requires the teacher to conduct a self-assessment of his or her beliefs that he or she possesses the skills and knowledge necessary to affect student achievement (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993).

Rather than classifying teacher efficacy as general or personal, Guskey and Passaro (1993) determined the differences to be more heavily based on internal and external factors. Internal factors might include a teacher's sense of personal influence, teaching autonomy, and perceived role within the school as an organization whereas external factors could include variables that are beyond the teacher's influence or control: SES, demographics, and familial value for education (1993). Though the internal and external factors are related, they are distinct concepts in that a teacher may believe that even though external factors present challenges, his or her specific skill set and ability to impact student learning can overcome those challenges (Guskey & Passaro, 1993).

Considering the construct of academic optimism and its relationship to student achievement in context, it is critical to analyze school operations from a social cognitive perspective determining how personal and organizational factors influence each other bi-directionally, acting as co-predictors of human functioning (Bandura, 1986, 1988, 1993; Eells, 2011). A variety of social and educational variables must be considered to do so: student variables such as prior achievement, readiness and motivation; teacher variables such as preparation, pedagogy, and efficacy; and school variables such as trust, organizational emphasis, leadership and support, and availability and attainability of

resources (Tshannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Schumacher, 2009; Eells, 2011). Further, there are external variables such as school location and students' demographics and socioeconomic status that cannot be controlled by school personnel. In the face of these diffuse and challenging variables are increasing accountability standards requiring school administrators to establish and maintain organizational climates that support teacher collaboration and affiliation with the school and its mission to accomplish goals and improve student achievement (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Bandura's (1986) model of triadic reciprocal determinism can be used to exemplify the inter-workings of the four previously mentioned sets of variables effectively describing the functioning of schools within the contexts of academic optimism. The premise of human agency (Bandura, 1993) suggests that the collective belief of an instructional faculty, collective teacher efficacy, can influence student learning (Hoy, et al., 2006; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000; 2004; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Likewise, research indicates a positive relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement (Bandura, 1989; 1993; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). Consistently, academic emphasis, also referred to in research literature as academic press, represents the organization's collective belief in scholastic purpose and how those beliefs are communicated to promote focus on academics influencing achievement (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002; Hoy et al., 2006). Finally, faculty trust in students and their parents suggests teachers' perceptions of students as willing and capable and their parents as supportive (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998;

2000, Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Again, research demonstrates that trust has a positive and significant influence on student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; 2000, Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001).

Considering the properties of efficacy, academic press, and faculty trust in students and parents as predictors of student achievement, Hoy and his colleagues (2006) identify the construct of academic optimism as a school's collective sense of purpose and potential across a range of cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions. Collective teacher efficacy is a group orientation and is cognitive; academic emphasis describes purposeful academic actions and is behavioral; and faculty trust in students and their parents is an emotional dynamic and affective (Hoy et al., 2006; Wagner, 2008, Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). These forces act reciprocally to develop a rather complex system of causation (Bandura, 1986; Eells, 2011).

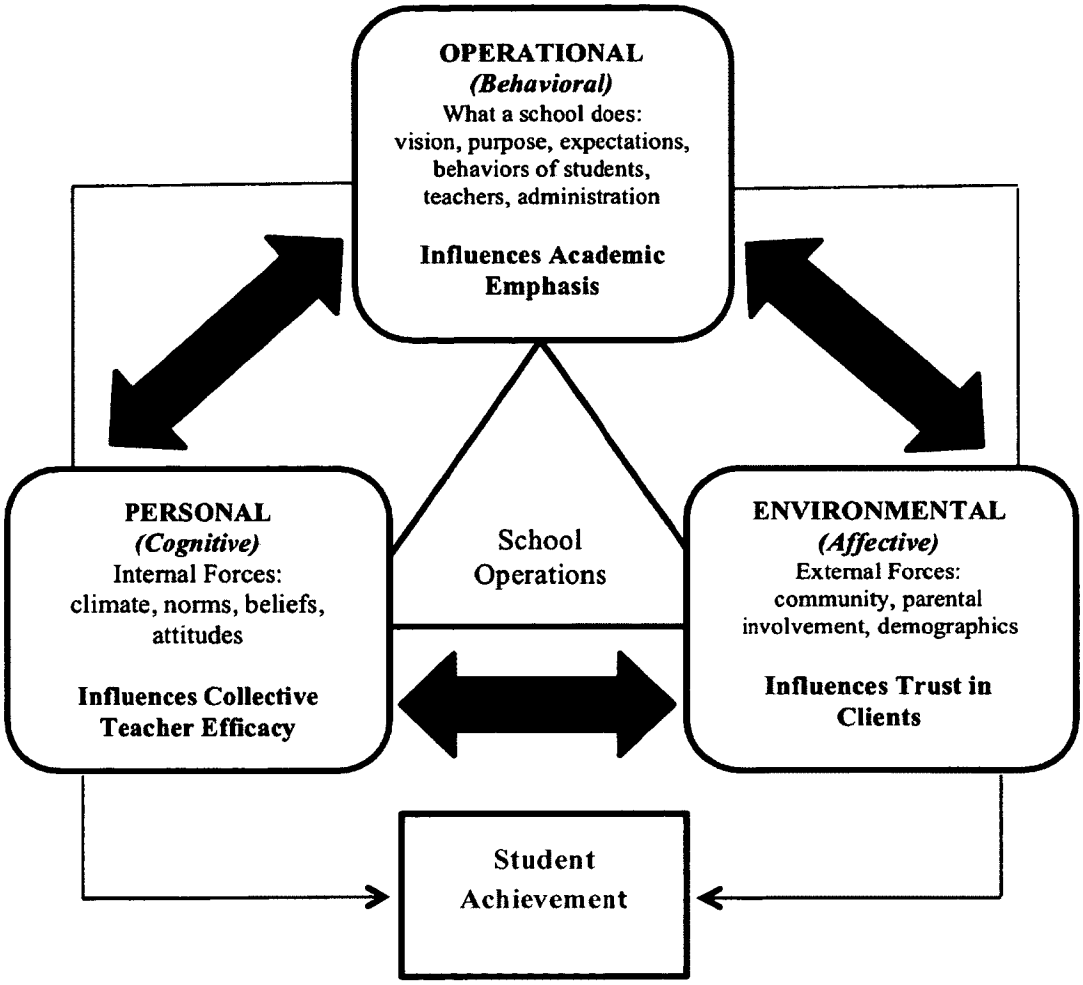



**Figure 1.1** Conceptual framework of academic optimism, school operations, and triadic reciprocal determination

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to determine the organizational characteristics and behaviors that lend to sustaining a culture of academic optimism as a mechanism of student achievement. While there is a developing research base identifying both the individual components of academic optimism as well as the construct academic optimism

itself as contributors to student achievement, little information exists to assist school leaders in identifying organizational practices that promote sustained collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and families. This study seeks to investigate the specific behaviors and practices that shape academic optimism and to determine relationships between that optimism and students' achievement.

*Guiding Question*

Qualitative data gathered through direct interviews, participant observations, and artifact/document review will be analyzed to satisfy the following query:

> How do teachers and administrators in high performing schools understand, foster, and sustain academic optimism, and what is the relationship between their sense of optimism and students' achievement?

*Definition of Terms*

**Well Performing High Schools**

For the purposes of this study, well performing high schools are identified as those where 90 percent or more of the students achieved a minimal "pass proficient", achieving a score of at least 400 on Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) End-of-Course (EOC) assessments for mathematics (e.g. Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II) and English (e.g. Reading, Language, and Research and Direct Writing). In Virginia's high schools, 70 percent of students must demonstrate proficiency in core content for school accreditation. Additionally, because schools must demonstrate student subgroup performance to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), studied high schools also had 75 percent or more pass rates in mathematics (2010-2011) and English among black students, Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged

students. Further, the schools in this qualitative case study enrolled a combined minimum of 30 percent of students in Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and/or regional International Baccalaureate (IB) offerings demonstrating an emphasis on rigorous curriculum and college and career readiness. Lastly, each school's Graduate Completer Index (GCI) exceeded 90 representing an organizational commitment to graduate students within four years of enrollment. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, a GCI of 85 is required for full state accreditation.

**Student Achievement**

Students' academic achievement is measured by performance on Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and English 11, reading and direct writing. The Virginia SOL end-of-course tests are criterion-referenced assessments with score bands ranging from 400-499 for proficiency and 500-600 for advanced proficiency. A full accreditation rating is awarded by the Virginia Department of Education to high schools at which 70 percent of testers achieve a score of 400 or greater. The schools used for this study had proficiency (pass) rates of 90 percent or more in mathematics and English.

# CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

*Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.*

~Helen Keller

### *Positive Psychology and Optimism as a Success Factor*

In *Fear and Courage*, Jack Ranchman (1990) pressed the scarcity of scientific research on human strengths comparing the abundance of studies and articles on fear and anxiety to the contrastingly limited references on courage. During the over 20 years since Ranchman's research, there has been growing interest in the study of human strengths, yet the discrepancy in research on positive versus negative human qualities remains significant. Gillham and Seligman (1999), cite that a search of psychological abstracts from 1967 through 1998 yielded approximately 60,000 articles, book chapters, and books on fear or anxiety while fewer than 500 publications on courage and resilience were produced. Similarly, Myers (2000a) reported that for every article on positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and life satisfaction, there are 21 articles on negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression. The evolution of positive human quality research was esteemed "surprisingly difficult within psychology's reductionist epistemological traditions, which train us to view positivity with suspicion, as a product of wishful thinking, denial, or hucksterism" (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 163). The researchers further contend that such skepticism, when taken too far, may constitute a negativity bias that prohibits a clear understanding of reality. Traditionally, psychological theories have been overwhelmingly powerful in predicting failure,

hopelessness, and despair but insufficient in explaining dynamics of hope, creativity, compassion, and other qualities that make life worthwhile (Seligman, 1998; Gillham & Seligman, 1999). As the majority of people earnestly viewed themselves as thriving, happy and satisfied with their lives, it had become increasingly apparent that normal human functioning cannot be accounted for within negative, problem-focused contexts (Gillham & Seligman, 1999; Myers, 2000b; Sheldon & King, 2001; Fredrickson, 2003).

Claiming the time had come for psychology to remember its two lost missions: fostering high talent and making life more fulfilling, Martin E.P. Seligman, former president of the American Psychological Association, launched a progression in the field when he called for a positive psychology emphasizing the sustaining emotions of joy, contentment, gratitude, and love as contributors to longer, healthier, more productive living (Seligman, 1998; Gillham & Seligman, 1999). More specifically defined, positive psychology is the "scientific study of ordinary human strengths and what goes right in life. Its interest is in discovering what works, what is right, and what is improving, not what fails, what is wrong, and what is declining" (Hoy & Tarter, 2011 p. 428). Positive psychology seeks to determine the nature of the effective functioning human being, the average person, who successfully applies evolved adaptations and learned skills, and thus it has challenged the field of conventional psychology to adopt more open and appreciative perspectives regarding human potential, motives, and capacities (Sheldon & King, 2001).

To conceptualize the general power of positive psychology, we need an understanding of how and why good feelings and favorable perspectives matter. With the assistance of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the originator of the "flow" concept to

describe peak motivational experiences, Seligman crafted the field for scientists whose work might be best described as investigating that which makes life worth living (Fredrickson, 2003). Subsequently, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) introduced learned helplessness, to convey how hopelessness and other negative thoughts and emotions can evolve into destructive behaviors and organizational stagnancy or setbacks. Moreover, cultures of blame and victimology were directly attributed to the traditionally negative focus of psychology (Gillham & Seligman, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) inhibiting personal growth. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's premise is simple yet profound: negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, and anger (pessimism) are counterproductive to personal actualization and fulfillment while the positive emotions of joy and love (optimism) broaden attention to thinking and can lead to the discovery of novel ideas, actions, and social bonds (Ranchman, 1979; Gillham & Seligman, 1999; Seligman, 2002; Fredrickson, 2003). As positive emotions and healthy relationships certainly predicate balanced life perspectives and optimal performance, they are as specifically significant to school interactions and dynamics. Considering the evolution of the individual in an organizational setting, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) affirmed,

> No longer do the dominant theories view the individual as a passive vessel responding to stimuli; rather, individuals are now seen as decision makers with choices, preferences, and the possibility of becoming masterful, efficacious, or in malignant circumstances, helpless and hopeless" (p. 8).

Historically, student achievement in schools has been deemed a function of talent and motivation (Seligman, 1998; Seligman, 2002). However, Seligman continued to

offer optimism as a third factor of success arguing that optimism matters as much as talent or motivation to student achievement and that learned optimism moves people over the wall of learned pessimism, not just as individuals but also as citizens of organizations (Seligman, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006). Optimistic schools and classrooms set students for success through emphasis on creativity, opportunities and possibilities (Wethington, 2003), overcoming adversity (Ryff & Singer, 2003), and trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006). Moreover, Hoy et al. (2006) contend, "Academic optimism, in stark contrast, views teachers as capable, students as willing, parents as supportive, and the task as achievable" (p. 440). The capability of teachers speaks to their collective efficacy; the task is achievable through consistent emphasis on academics; and trust allows educational professionals to view students as willing and their parents as supportive.

*Collective Teacher Efficacy*

Gibson and Dembo (1984) discovered that individual teacher efficacy could be measured consistently and reliably and was comprised of two factors: the teacher's sense of personal responsibility for student learning; and the teacher's sense of teaching efficacy, the general belief that he has the ability to make a positive difference in students' achievement regardless of external variables. Bandura (1997) contended that individual human behaviors were purposeful and represented interaction between emotional and environmental conditions resulting in specific behavioral outcomes but also conveyed that although humans were self-directive, behaviors were context-specific.

Thus, it is possible for an individual to have high self-efficacy for one activity while maintaining lower efficacy for another (Bandura, 1989, 1997).

Efficacy, considered at the school level, becomes an organizational property reflecting the collective beliefs about the capability of the school to achieve its goals (Goddard, et al., 2000; Eells, 2011). Though limited when compared to literature on individual teacher efficacy, existing research in collective teacher efficacy deems it an evolving construct for advancing student achievement (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). In schools, collective efficacy represents perceptions of the performance capability of the social system as a whole and is a group attribute rather than the aggregate of individual teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993, 1997, 2001). As such, collective teacher efficacy involves more than positive thinking and optimism and is connected to the construct of agency, the individual and collective ability to identify challenges and take action to overcome them (Bandura 1993, 1997, 2001). Goddard and his colleagues (Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000, 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004) were the catalysts in using collective efficacy as an organizational construct citing collective efficacy's emphasis on optimism, well being, and moral and human agency fits well into the positive psychological perspective. Goddard et al. (2004) define collective efficacy as the judgment of teachers that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the actions required to have positive effects on students. Supporting Goddard's research, Hoy and Tarter (2011) conveyed, "Optimistic individuals will persist in their efforts to achieve, and optimistic organizations will actively search to find ways to attain their goals" (p. 434). Similar to individual teacher efficacy, Goddard et al. (2000) specified two critical components to the

development of collective teacher efficacy: analysis of the teaching task and the assessment of the group teaching competence concluding,

> Factors that characterize the task include the abilities and motivations of students, the availability of instructional materials, the presence of community resources and constraints, and the appropriateness of the physical facilities. The analysis of the teaching competencies suggests inferences about the faculty's [collective] teaching skills, methods, training, and expertise and may also include positive faculty beliefs in the ability of all students to achieve. (p. 485)

Essentially, practices that foster effective teaching such as planning and instructional delivery constitute teaching tasks while collective skill and ability levels create competency. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) developed the Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale as a measure of efficacy as it is respectively germane to general teaching competence and task analysis. The 21-item tool uses a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and includes the following sample items:

- Teachers in this school are able to get through to difficult students.
- If a child doesn't want to learn something the first time, teachers will try another way.
- Teachers in this school think there are some students that no one can reach.
- The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn.
- Teachers in this school are skilled in various methods of teaching.

Researchers have determined difficulty for teachers to detach analysis of teaching task from analysis of teaching competence when assessing their individual capability

through simultaneous analysis of the task against their abilities and beliefs (Goddard et al., 2004, Schumacher, 2009). However, through their study of 47 elementary schools, Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) determined teachers' task analysis and overall group competence interacted to create the sense of collective teacher efficacy within the school.

Consistently, Chubb (1988) found that as far as classroom practices and formal structures are concerned, there is very little difference between high and low performing schools. Rather, the greatest distinctions were evident in student bodies and informal organizations when leadership was strong, expectations were high, and authority was delegated to the classroom (teacher autonomy). While teachers' respective outlooks shape individual efficacy, the general values and views of the school as an organization craft a collective efficacy that does not have to concur with the perceptions of others outside the school. It is this collective efficacy that emphasizes the reality of the faculty experience and subsequently influences teacher behavior (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Shumacher, 2009; Eels, 2011). Conversely, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) demonstrated how low individual teacher efficacy could erode and demoralize collective efficacy citing that,

> Schools where teachers' conversations dwell on the insurmountable difficulties of educating students are likely to undermine teachers' sense of efficacy. Yet, schools where teachers work together to find ways to address the learning, motivation, and behavior problems of their students are likely to enhance teachers' feelings of efficacy. (p. 221)

Supporting Tschannen-Moran's position, Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) found collective efficacy as a central variable in explaining student achievement. Moreover, they determined that collective teacher efficacy was more important than either socioeconomic status (SES) or academic emphasis, another construct of academic optimism. Hoy et al. also concluded, "when collective efficacy is strong, an emphasis on academic pursuits directs teachers' behaviors, helps them persist, and reinforces social norms of collective efficacy" (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006, pp. 428-429). Further, Goddard, Logerfo, and Hoy (2004) found collective efficacy to explain student achievement in the content areas of reading, writing, and social studies, regardless of demographics, urbanicity, SES, school size, or students' prior achievement.

Bandura (1997) characterized individual self-efficacy as having four explicit sources of cognitive processing: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and affective state. Accordingly, each of Bandura's four sources also endorses collective teacher efficacy. Mastery experience, cited as the most significant of the four sources (Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004), is the practice of providing teachers with successful experiences that increase confidence in their abilities to impact student achievement.

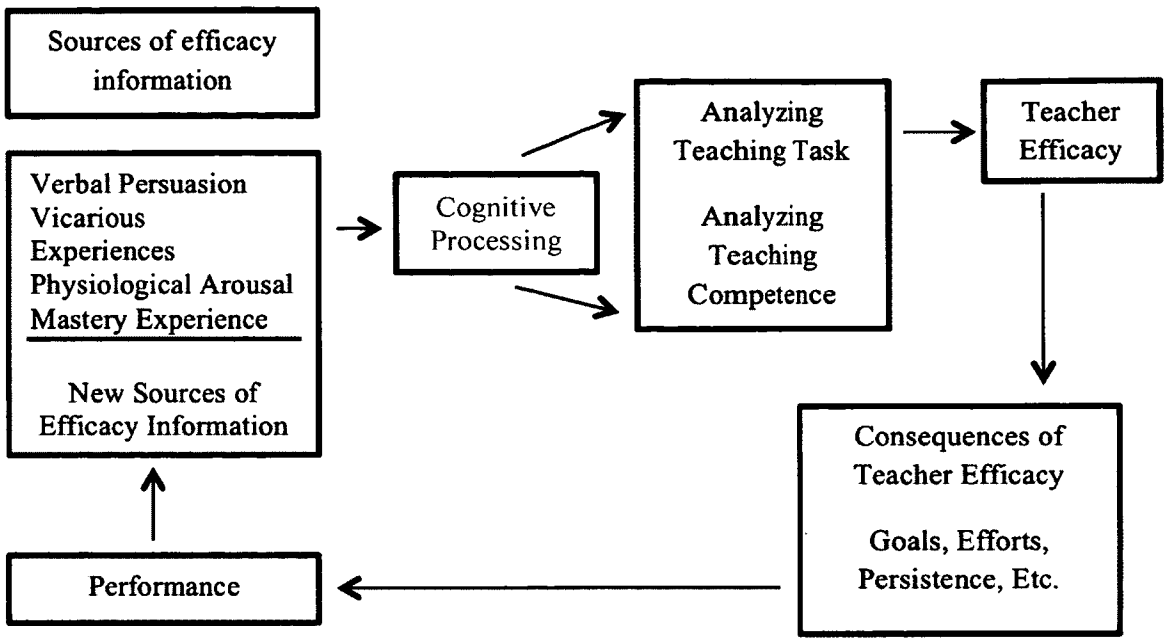



**Figure 2.1** The cyclical nature of teachers' sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998)

Mastery experiences are commonly provided through professional development activities designed to enhance instructional practice thus more positively influencing student achievement. Once teachers have had experiences that increase student achievement, they are more likely to believe that they can replicate such efforts and outcomes (Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004). As an example, through her study of 50 high schools, Tschannen-Moran (2001) concluded that collective teacher efficacy was positively related to the implementation of a conflict management program provided by the schools. Considering the relationship between mastery experience and collective teacher efficacy, it is critical that school leaders design purposeful, relevant, and practical development opportunities for teachers. As important, opportunities should be designed to support teachers toward success rather than to guard them against failure (Goddard et al., 2004).

The second source associated with teacher efficacy, vicarious learning, also relies on previous successful experiences to build efficacy. However, through vicarious learning teachers learn through observing the successful practices and experiences of other teachers (Bandura, 1997). Bandura's perspective is supported by Tschannen-Moran & Barr (2004) who convey, "Teachers have opportunities for vicarious learning experiences when teachers from [a lower performing] school visit another school where student achievement is high. Teachers share strategies, methods, activities, and samples of student work and are able to see what works in improving student outcomes" (p. 205). Vicarious learning is most beneficial when conducted between teachers or school settings that are similar (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000, 2004). More clearly, teachers in rural, high poverty schools are most likely to benefit more through vicarious learning experiences with other, more successful, rural, high poverty schools. As with any development opportunity, mastery experience or vicarious learning, teachers should be afforded chances to collaboratively synthesize and dialogue about successful practices that lend to increased student achievement.

Similarly, the social persuasion element of collective teacher efficacy exists when leaders, formal and informal, verbally encourage or persuade colleagues or subordinates to believe that they have the skills and abilities to improve student achievement. This dynamic is primarily enforced through regular discussion of teacher expectations, instructional practices, and student outcomes (Bandura, 1997). As an example, a principal may persuade a faculty of its collective capability to advance students by fostering an organizational culture that encourages collaboration and innovation (Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004). Informally, social persuasion may exist through

discussions in the teachers' lounge or the community with the ability of persuasion heavily dependent on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader (Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004). Social persuasion is rooted in the power of normative press as found in research literature on the socio-cognitive perspective in which group norms are developed to exert influence over the decisions and actions of an individual particularly when those actions impact the entire group (Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Schumacher, 2009; Goddard & Goddard, 2002). Theoretically, if it is the general belief among faculty that teachers can collectively have a positive influence on student achievement, individual members of that faculty will be motivated to exert the energy and effort required to make it happen. Thus, as previously mentioned, a teacher with high individual efficacy may have that efficacy diminished when joining an overwhelmingly complacent or unmotivated faculty (Goddard & Goddard, 2002).

The final source impacting collective teacher efficacy is affective state. According to Goddard et al. (2004) organizations are similar to individuals in that they are impacted by collective successes and failures. The affective state represents the culture and climate of the school and reflects the emotional well being of the instructional staff (Schumacher, 2009). Schools in which teachers render themselves powerless in affecting student achievement typically do not positively impact achievement outcomes. Yet, when teachers collectively perceive themselves as capable of producing high student achievement, they create a culture of success, a positive atmosphere for learning (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Goddard & Goddard, 2002; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Schools with higher collective teacher efficacy

levels house support systems that build teamwork toward a unified outcome, thus encouraging greater professional resilience and an increased willingness to embrace areas of needed growth. Efficacious organizations can tolerate pressure and adversity while continuing to function without debilitating consequences; in fact, they learn how to adapt and cope with disruptive forces (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000).

Naturally, individual teacher efficacy and collective teacher efficacy are positively related. However, as previously mentioned, each has its own idiosyncratic characteristics. Collective efficacy is a group attribute rather than the summative of individual teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Essentially, a teacher could possess a high level of individual efficacy, but may perceive the collective efficacy of his or her school as low. On the contrary, individuals with a low sense of self-efficacy can exist within schools where collective efficacy is high (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Studies by Goddard and Goddard (2001) and Knobloch and Whittington (2002) concur that teacher efficacy, particularly among novice teachers positively related to the collective efficacy of their schools citing collective efficacy as the only statistically significant predictor of between-school variance in individual teacher efficacy. As collective teacher efficacy is an organizational property, it can have a most significant role in shaping the culture, beliefs, and norms of a school, which, in turn, delineates the student achievement occurring there. Highly efficacious schools clearly communicate high expectations of students, foster distinguished instructional practice, extend remediation opportunities, and promote collaboration and innovation. Teachers in these schools are more typically well planned, have more productive relationships with students, and spend more time emphasizing academics (Goddard et al., 2000; Tschannen-

Moran & Barr, 2004; Schumacher, 2009). Additionally, high collective teacher efficacy correlates to trust among faculty, students and parents, and administration (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

*Academic Emphasis*

Academic emphasis, commonly referred to in research literature as academic press, is a construct outlining the extent to which a school is driven by a quest for academic excellence, a press for academic achievement (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006). Correlations between a strong academic focus and student achievement have been consistently supported by research studies (Zigarelli, 1996; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Hannum & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Erbe, 2000). Lee and Bryk (1989) revealed a directly positive correlation between a school's emphasis of academics and its students' achievement and found that schools with more orderly and disciplined environments experienced less achievement distribution (achievement gaps) between ethnic minority groups and white students. Hoy and his colleagues (1991) replicated Lee and Bryk's study with similar results indicating academic emphasis as a collective property positively and directly related to student achievement in high schools after controlling for SES. An attribute of school climate, academic emphasis was initially assessed by the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (Haplin & Croft, 1963) as part of the researchers' analysis of school and teacher characteristics that foster open and closed school environments. Subsequent studies by Bryk and Driscoll (1988) also support academic emphasis as an organizational climate property highlighting its consensus over beliefs and values, common agenda of curriculum, activities, ceremonies and traditions, and its ethic of caring which strongly affects relationships between

students and adults. The community sense and purpose cultivated by an emphasis on academics has also been evidenced by higher attendance rates, increased morale among students and teachers, and higher levels of student achievement regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or SES (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Shouse, 1996; Goddard et al., 2000). Advancing academic emphasis as a school climate construct, Shouse (1996) claimed that "all schools, particularly low-SES schools can increase student achievement by placing their academic mission at center stage and allowing their social mission to play a supporting role" (p. 18). His study of 398 schools, introduced three elements that contribute to the academic emphasis of a school: academic climate; disciplinary climate; and the instructional practices and emphasis of teachers. Shouse suggests that a school's academic climate is supported through offering students access to rigorous curriculum, such as opportunities for honors or Advanced Placement courses, and regularly recognizing students with outstanding academic performance. He goes on to posit that the disciplinary climate is established through policies that promote productive school behavior and regular daily attendance. Finally, Shouse (1996) asserts that effective instructional practice demands that teachers adhere to objective and challenging content standards, afford students opportunities for authentic, engaging, and relevant classroom experiences, and provide frequent and purposeful feedback. The study suggests successful schools are those where "a sense of community emerges as a positive result of a strong sense of academic purpose" (p. 19). Generally, purpose, polices, practices, and beliefs are interwoven within the school climate shaping academic press and positively influencing student achievement (Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006). Further research indicates that a

principal's actions of maintaining an orderly learning environment, emphasizing academic achievement, and holding high expectations of students have a significant but indirect influence on student achievement (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Oden & Oden, 2005; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006).

The pursuit of academic excellence extends the facets of effective schools research including the school's establishment of high, achievable goals for all students; an orderly and serious learning environment; a strong emphasis on instructional time and academics; and organizational practices to motivate students to work hard and respect academic success (Edmonds, 1979; Murphy et al., 1982; Hoy et al., 1991; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Hoy et al., 2006a, 2006b; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). Additionally, the research of Odden and Odden (2005) suggests instructional pacing, especially during the first weeks of the school year, as an important classroom practice, but more greatly identifies organizational characteristics such as strong instructional principal leadership; regularized monitoring of progress toward academic goals; and consistent professional development as key contributors to academic emphasis. Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, and Mittman (1982) researched the policies and practices that influence academic press distinguishing between school-level policies and classroom-level practices and behaviors concluding that "academic press can be maximized when school-level policies and enforcement practices form the framework for classroom-level activity" (p. 26). Again, the researchers identified five efficacious teacher practices that contribute to academic press:

1. Establishing an academically demanding climate;
2. Maintaining an orderly, well managed classroom;

3. Ensuring students' academic success;
4. Implementing instructional practice that promotes achievement; and
5. Extending students opportunities to exhibit responsibility and leadership (p. 25).

Wagner (2008) identified commonality between collective efficacy and academic emphasis in that both are school-leveled traits based on individual teacher perceptions asserting that "Teachers' beliefs about themselves and their colleagues' ability to positively impact student performance help to establish high achievement norms in schools which ultimately influence the academic behaviors of students and teachers" (p. 46). One such high achievement norm is the value and preservation of instructional time, a variable identified by Smith (as cited in Kurz, 2006) as having a directly positive relationship to increased student achievement.

Also considering academic emphasis and collective teacher efficacy, Hoy et al. (2002, 2006) noted reciprocal relationships in which higher levels of efficacy produced greater student achievement, but greater student achievement also was shown to yield higher teacher efficacy levels. Thus they concluded that academic emphasis is developed through collective efficacy ultimately influencing students' success. This dynamic is predicated upon healthy and trusting classroom and school relationships as academic press is vain if teachers do not display genuine interest in students and behave in ways that demonstrate high efficacy and emphasis of academics. Using data from the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991), an eight-item scale, Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) determined that academic emphasis is a significant predictor of student achievement in reading and mathematics for poor and

minority students. The OHI employs a six-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" to measure academic press and includes the following items:

- Students respect others who get good grades.
- Students try hard to improve on previous work.
- The learning environment is orderly and serious.
- Teachers in this school believe that their students have the ability to achieve academically.
- Students neglect completing homework.
- Students make provisions to acquire extra help from teachers.
- Students seek extra work so that they can get good grades.
- Academically oriented (students who do well in school) are not ridiculed by their peers.

The researchers noted that an increase in academic emphasis of one standard deviation was associated with a gain of .4 of a standard deviation in student achievement in math and greater than .33 of a standard deviation in reading achievement (Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy, 2000) clearly illustrating that schools with higher academic emphasis also had higher levels of student achievement. Schools with a strong academic emphasis have teachers who not only hold high expectations for students, but also genuinely believe that students can be motivated to work hard and meet those expectations. Moreover, students, teachers, and administrators in schools that value academic emphasis regularly acknowledge and respect academic achievement (Murphy et al., 1982; Hoy, Tarter, et al., 2006; Hoy, Smith, et al., 2002; Wagner, 2008). Hoy et al. (2006) conclude:

> Notwithstanding different methodological approaches and school levels, the results are consistent...academic emphasis is a key variable in explaining student achievement, even after controlling for SES, previous achievement, and other demographic variables. (p. 427)

It is essential that schools acknowledge and promote academic emphasis as a chief contributor to the success of all students and hold the value that every student should have access to challenging curriculum and authentic courses of study (Hoy et al., 2006). Schools with distinguished academic emphasis hold equally high demands and expectations for every student offering strong, individualized support and ensuring that every student achieves at a high level (Hoy et al., 2002; Hoy et al., 2006; Benkovitz, 2008).

*Faculty Trust in Students and Parents*

The concept of trust has been a subject of interest for centuries and has been expressed artistically and anecdotally in literature, philosophy, folklore, and politics (Petersen, 2008). Conventionally, trust studies of the 1950s into the 1960s worked to create interest for the purpose of interpreting and addressing the ills of the Cold War and the arms race (Deutsch, 1958). Later studies of trust were used to examine the issues of the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Marzano, 2000) and increasing divorce rates of the 1980s (Bradach & Eccles, 1989; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). As schools began to evolve as both social and learning organizations in the 1990s and early 21st century, trust research also advanced to include studies in educational relationships and dynamics (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hoy et al., 1992; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, 2000). As a result, the future of educational organizations relies on the establishment and

maintenance of trust as a method of positively influencing the quality of work life, performance efficiency and overall effectiveness (Nyhan, 2000). Further, evaluations of trust are highly dependent on individuals' experiences, expectations, and interpretations. Lewicki and Bunker (1995) suggested that the study of trust might be categorized according to how trust is individually viewed and extended the work of Deutsh (1958) who sought to determine the conditions, motivations, and communication individuals considered when deciding to trust or distrust others. Further still, Cummings and Bromiley's (1997) three-faceted framework categorizes trust based on the following assumptions: an individual or group makes good-faith efforts to behave in accordance with any explicit and implicit commitments; an individual or group is honest in whatever negotiations preceded such commitments; and an individual or group does not take advantage of others when the opportunity is available. While there is research identifying individual, interpersonal, transactional, and institutional views on trust, few trust scholars have attempted to integrate these different perspectives to articulate the key role trust plays in the formation of critical social processes (Kaneshiro, 2008). Applying Kaneshiro's perspective to education, early effective schools research proposed the topic of trust between schools and families through identifying home-school support as fundamentally pervasive elements of healthy and successful schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001) though the direct correlation between school-parent partnerships and student achievement was initially unclear.

The definitions of trust are multidimensional and researchers have commonly impressed their own viewpoints on the topic. Deutsch (1958) claimed a person may have trust if he or she is anticipating something to occur which leads to a more positive than

negative outcome. Bradach and Eccles (1989) conveyed that trust is an expectation that one participant or partner will not take advantage of another. Yet, Mishra (1996) found trust to be one's inclination to be vulnerable to another with the confidence that the other party will be concerned, competent, reliable, and open. Ultimately, after reviewing over 150 articles on trust, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) qualified the construct through five facets, the descriptors included in their conceptual definition of trust. The researchers define trust as "a person's willingness to make themselves vulnerable to another person or group, relying on the confidence that the other party exhibits the following characteristics or facets: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness" (p.189). Each of these dimensions of trust is outlined below.

*Benevolence* is "the confidence that one's well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted person or group. One can count on the good will of the other to act in one's best interest. In an ongoing relationship, future actions or deeds may not be specified but only that there will be a mutual attitude of good will" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 187). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) considered benevolence one of the most common dimensions of trust.

*Reliability* is "the extent to which one can count on another to come through with what is needed. Reliability combines a sense of predictability with benevolence" (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 187).

*Competence* is "the general craft and knowledge skill level" (p. 188). Hoy and his colleagues (2006) define competence as the ability to perform in accordance with appropriate standards. Extending a specific example, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999)

describe the patient of a young surgeon who feels that his doctor wishes very much to heal him, but exhibits distrust if the physician has a poor performance record.

*Honesty* "speaks to character, integrity, and authenticity. Statements are truthful when they conform to 'what really happened' from that person's perspective and when commitments made about future actions are kept" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 188). When actions and intentions are aligned, honesty, character, and integrity are exposed (Hoy et al., 2005).

*Openness* is "the extent to which relevant information is not withheld; it is a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others. Such openness signals a kind of reciprocal trust, a confidence that the information will not be exploited and that recipients can feel the same confidence in return" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p.188).

As trust is germane to the educational setting, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) investigation sought to determine the level of faculty trust in schools. Their study had four aims: to measure the faces of trust in school facilities; to examine the factor structure of faculty trust; to explore the interrelationships between faculty trust in students, teachers, and parents; and to test the relationship between faculty trust and parental collaboration. Examining trust as a collective organizational characteristic, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) and Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) developed the Omnibus Trust Survey (2003), a measurement tool to assess trust as a school trait that positively relates to collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. The instrument employs a six-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and includes the following sample items:

- Teachers in this school trust their students.
- Teachers in this school trust the parents.
- Even in difficult situations, teachers in this school can depend on each other.
- Parents in this school are reliable in their commitments.
- Teachers here believe students are competent learners.

Additionally, the instrument was developed through four phases to ensure that various dimensions could be said to belong to a judgment about trust: a panel of experts reacted to the items; a preliminary version was field tested with teachers; a pilot study was done with a small group of schools to test the factor structure of the instrument, its reliability, and its validity; and a large scale study was conducted in which the psychometric properties of the final instrument were assessed. Though Hoy and Tschannen-Moran anticipated four factors of trust in schools, only three emerged from the research with trust in students and trust in parents merging to form a single factor eventually identified as trust in clients (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), "a collective school property in the same fashion as collective efficacy and academic emphasis" (Hoy, Tarter, &Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006, p. 429). The remaining factors were trust in the principal and trust in colleagues. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's study yielded moderate correlation between the three dimensions, supporting the researchers' first hypothesis. Trust in the principal was related to trusts in colleagues ($r = .37$, $p < .01$) and trust in clients ($r = .42$, p, .01). Trust in colleagues correlated with trust in clients ($r = .35$, p, .01). Moreover, the second hypothesis, which predicted that faculty trust is positively related to a school's collaboration with parents in school decision making, was also supported (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). The researchers concluded

that faculty trust in students and parents significantly impacted school effectiveness and student achievement in reading and mathematics. Additionally, the study yielded indirect connections between faculty trust and student achievement through collective efficacy indicating that higher collective efficacy among a school's faculty produced greater levels of trust in students and parents even when controlling for SES, ethnicity, and students' prior achievement (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000; Wagner, 2008). In his study of trust in high schools, Hoy (2002) found faculty trust in clients to positively and significantly correlate with student achievement despite the ramifications of socioeconomic background.

Bryk and Schneider (as cited in Hoy et al., 2006) conducted a three-year longitudinal study finding, "Relational trust was a prime source of school improvement. Trust and cooperation among students, teachers, and parents positively influenced [regular daily] attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new practices" (p. 430). Hence, there is research consensus that trust is an unequivocal necessity for organizational dynamics of leadership, team building, team work (involving partnerships with students and their families), goal setting, performance evaluation, and negotiation (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). Regardless of miscommunication, mistakes, or occasional disagreement, trust among teachers and their students and students' families is essential to promoting the organization's purpose and achieving its goals (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, 2002).

*The Unified Construct of Academic Optimism*

The properties of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust shape school norms and expectations, and are not only related in their "nature and

function but also in their potent and positive influence on student achievement" (Hoy et al., 2006b., p. 141). Hoy and his colleagues proceeded to note that the three collective properties combine in a unified fashion to craft a positive schooling environment characterized by the label academic optimism, which crafts human agency explaining:

> Our conception of academic optimism includes both cognitive and affective (emotional) dimensions and adds a behavioral element. Collective efficacy is a group belief or expectation; it is cognitive. Faculty trust in parents and students is an affective response. Academic emphasis is the push for particular behaviors in the school workplace. (Hoy et al., 2006, p.431)

The researchers further contend that relationships between the three dimensions of academic optimism are triadic with each element functionally dependent on the others supporting that faculty trust encourages a sense of collective efficacy, and collective efficacy reinforces and enhances trust. Moreover, when a faculty trusts students and parents, they can more comfortably insist on higher academic standards knowing that they will receive support from both groups (Tshannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Hoy et al., 2006; Woolfolk-Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008). Finally, when the faculty believes it has the ability to perform action that will positively affect students' achievement, academic achievement is more greatly emphasized, and reciprocally strengthens sense of collective efficacy (Hoy et al., 2006; Woolfolk-Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008; Wagner, 2008). The reciprocal relationships of academic optimism are conceptualized in Figure 2.2. Academic optimism is identified from the "conviction that its composite properties all express optimism and are malleable" (Hoy et al., 2006, p. 432). Thus, academic optimism

can be adopted and learned. Essentially, a pessimistic school can evolve into an optimistic one (2006).

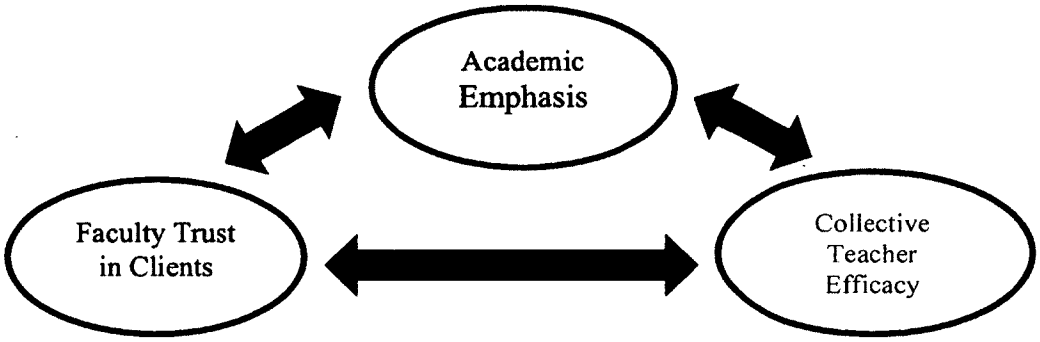



**Figure 2.2** Reciprocal relationships between the properties of academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006)

Optimism has conventionally been studied as an individual characteristic, a tendency to believe that one will most often experience good outcomes in life and avoid bad ones (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Hence, Woolfolk-Hoy, Hoy, and Kurz (2008) theorized that academic optimism exists at the individual teacher level just as it does at the organizational or school level citing that they "view a teacher's sense of academic optimism as a latent construct comprised of three highly related concepts—teacher sense of efficacy, teacher's trust in students and parents, and teacher's focus on creating a positive and challenging academic environment for students" (p. 822). Connecting academic optimism as an individual teacher construct to social cognitive theory, Woolfolk-Hoy and her colleagues (2008) assert that if teachers believe they are capable of affecting student learning, they set higher expectations, exert greater effort, and persist in the face of difficulties. Considering that people typically act, reflect on their actions, and adjust their behaviors accordingly, teachers proactively develop mental

plans to address occurrences as they arise (Bandura, 1997, 2006). In social cognitive theory, this type efficacy is critical to human agency. Within the context of the classroom, Woolfolk-Hoy et al. (2008) identify classroom management, student-centered instructional strategies, and climates that promote individual citizenship as positive predictors of academic optimism that counteract students' SES, ethnicity, and disability status.

*Academic Optimism and School Climate*

Though organizational climate originated as a topical construct in the late 1950s, Halpin and Croft (1963) introduced the idea in the field of education through creating the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), an instrument initially used to gauge climate in elementary schools but was later extended to high school research (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). Nonetheless, society and schools changed extensively from the 1960s into the 1980s and rendered the OCDQ inappropriate and invalid as a contemporary school climate measure (Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990). Subsequently, Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland (2002) crafted the Organizational Health Index (OHI) emphasizing academic press (academic emphasis), collegial leadership, institutional vulnerability (related to faculty trust in students and parents), and professional teacher behavior (including teacher and collective efficacy traits). Shortly after, Hoy (2003) developed the Organizational Climate Index (OCI), and current research literature illustrates a direct positive relationship between levels of academic optimism and OCI properties. Further, the tenets of academic optimism promote what Hoy and Sweetland (2001) identified as enabling school structure, a hierarchy that helps rather than hinders with a system of rules and regulations that guide problem solving rather than punishing failure. Hoy and

Sweetland found shared authority within established roles, effective communication, respecting differences, viewing problems as opportunities, fostering trust, and learning from mistakes enabled bureaucracies in schools. Enabling bureaucracy has also been demonstrated to correlate with trust, honesty, teacher sense of power, and genuine interpersonal relationships among teachers (2001).

*Academic Optimism and Teacher Commitment*

As previously discussed, academic optimism is a collective construct typically belonging to schools rather than individual teachers. Research connecting academic optimism and teacher commitment levels is limited leaving much opportunity for further exploration. However, Nan Kurz (2006), a doctoral student at Ohio State University, conducted one of the first studies to test academic optimism as an individual teacher trait with the "fundamental assertion if teachers have a sense of efficacy, trust in their students and parents, and emphasize the importance of academic tasks, their commitment to the profession would be strong and positive" (p. 47). As cited by Kurz, two forms of teacher commitment serve as topics for previous research studies: organizational commitment and personal commitment. While organizational commitment refers to beliefs and behaviors related to the well-being of a community, personal commitment pertains mainly to beliefs and actions dealing with the school, teaching profession, and students (Mowday et al., 1979; Elliot & Croswell, 2002). Kurz's study focused on individual teacher's beliefs and the relationship with their individual sense of commitment. The study investigated the positive teacher traits related to commitment using the "two theoretical frames of social cognitive theory and positive psychology" (Kurz, 2006, p. 106). Tests of significance were employed to determine if teacher variables such as years

of experience, licensure status, and highest degree attained and student factors such as SES, ethnicity, and disability status influenced a teacher's level of academic optimism and ultimately his or her professional commitment (2006). Pertaining to commitment, Kurz posed the research question: Is teachers' sense of academic optimism related to their commitment to the profession (p.106)?

As a sample, Kurz randomly selected 351 third and fourth grade teachers in Ohio. Two hundred and twenty five responses were returned and used for the investigation. The survey instrument included items from several existing tools: the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001), the Omnibus T-Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), Academic Press Scale (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2001), and the Organizational Citizenship Behavioral Scale (DiPaola, Tarter, & Hoy, 2005). After analyzing the construct of academic optimism as it relates to classroom contexts and teacher factors, Kurz explored the relationship between optimism and commitment concluding, "Teachers' sense of academic optimism was positively related to teachers' commitment to the profession. Classroom context and teacher expertise variables were not related to commitment" (Kurz, 2006, p. 108).

*Academic Optimism and Student Achievement*

To date, a limited number of research studies have been produced on academic optimism as an overarching construct impacting student achievement. Rather, extensive research has been published on each of the three properties of academic optimism: collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents as each relates to student learning. As cited, efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust connect not only in their makeup and function but also in their "potent and positive influence on

student achievement" (Hoy et. al, 2006, p. 431) and achievement variables. Additionally, Seligman (1998) conveyed that optimism is a third factor of student success contributing as much as talent or motivation to achievement.

### *Collective Efficacy and Achievement*

Goddard et al. (2000) took a critical look at the impact of collective efficacy on the achievement of elementary school students. In his subsequent study, Goddard (2001) controlled for students' previous achievement and other demographic variables to again demonstrate that collective efficacy was positively and significantly related to student achievement. After controlling for SES and academic press in secondary schools, Hoy et al. (2002) indicated collective efficacy as a key contributor to students' success. Further, they concluded that academic press worked through the construct of collective efficacy (Hoy et al., 2002). Building on the previous research, Goddard, LoGerfo et al. (2004) examined the role of collective efficacy at the high school level emphasizing subject area achievement beyond the reading and math indicators from previous studies. Again, a strong, positive relationship was deemed between collective efficacy and achievement outcomes regardless of urbanicity and student demographics.

### *Academic Emphasis and Achievement*

Two of the first researchers to identify relationships between student achievement and academic emphasis were Lee and Bryk (1989) who examined mathematics achievement in high schools. Lee and Bryk's study of academic climate investigated the average time students spent completing homework and other academic tasks outside of school, the degree to which more students wanted more academic press in their schools, and the general attitudes of students towards academics. The variables mentioned

comprised the academic organization of the high school, and the outcomes suggested a significant impact on the social distribution of achievement. Hoy et al. (1990) compared results collected from the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI), in which academic emphasis is a dimension, to the more empirically-based Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ-RS) to predict student achievement. Results indicated that the elements of the OHI strongly related to student achievement while the measures of the OCDQ-RS did not. Hoy et al. (1991) found academic emphasis as a critical element in an open, healthy school citing, "when openness is linked with a press for achievement that is high but achievable, the learning environment is orderly and serious, teachers believe students can achieve, and students are committed to doing well, schools are successful. Students achieve at high levels" (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991, p. 204).

### *Trust and Student Achievement*

The aforementioned Goddard et al. (2001) study considered the relationship between faculty trust and student achievement. Controlling for previous achievement, demographic characteristics, and SES in an urban elementary school, the researchers discovered that faculty trust in students and their parents was a significant positive predictor of differences between schools in reading and mathematics achievement. Hoy and his colleagues (2002) found similar outcomes after investigating the relationship between trust and achievement at the high school level after controlling for SES.

*Discussion*

Fifty years ago, the general assumption was that the best path to creating healthier, more productive organizations was the intense focus on the development of people as individuals. As society and organizational dynamics have evolved, development has come to be interpreted by strategies employed to achieve and maintain organizational stability in the face of challenges (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Thus, contemporary theorists contend that we must develop organizations to create healthier and more effective people (Mirvis, 1988). Meanwhile, the context of schooling has also shifted during the past couple decades emphasizing the social and organizational characteristics that influence students' learning beyond their socioeconomic status (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2005). As a result, academic optimism and its impact on school climate, teacher commitment to the profession, and student achievement holds as an organizational development mechanism that ultimately works to improve the outlook and performance of administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Seligman's (1998) positive psychology, the "scientific study of ordinary human strengths and what goes right in life" (Hoy & Tarter, 2011 p. 428) endorses discovering and emphasizing what works and what is improving in schools, rather than becoming overly consumed by failing practice and what is wrong. Further, Seligman positioned optimism as a third factor of student success in schools arguing that optimism matters as much as talent or motivation in achievement. Hoy et al. (2006) added that learned optimism moves people over the wall of learned pessimism, not just as individuals but also as organizational members contending, "Academic optimism, in stark contrast, views teachers as capable, students as willing, parents as supportive, and the task as achievable" (p. 440).

The basic prescription of academic optimism is that it fosters genuine partnerships between school administrators, teachers, students, and students' families unifying all parties around the belief that no obstacles are insurmountable in the effort of ensuring that students succeed academically. Moreover, each stakeholder has a critically specific role, which contributes to the partnership created by optimism. Principals and administration must craft and maintain a culture that promotes academic emphasis. Teachers in turn adopt the academic emphasis and exhibit their commitment to it through acts that demonstrate both their individual and collective beliefs in students as well as their abilities to reach them regardless of the difficulties. Lastly, trust in students and parents cultivates the assumption of goodwill and relationships of support giving students every conceivable possibility to be successful in school.

# CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

*Power is the faculty or capacity to act, the strength and potency to accomplish something. It is the vital energy to make choices and decisions. It also includes the capacity to overcome deeply embedded habits to cultivate higher, more effective ones.*

~Steven R. Covey

The purpose of this multi-case study is to identify the organizational characteristics and behaviors that contribute to sustaining a school culture that fosters academic optimism, unifying the properties of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents as mechanisms to enhance student achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006; Wagner, 2008; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). While there is a significant body of research identifying both the individual and collective properties of academic optimism as contributors to student achievement, little information exists to assist school leaders in determining congruent organizational practices that provide sustained collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and families. This study seeks to identify and describe the behaviors and institutionalized practices that support academic optimism, as well as to explain how that optimism is continued in well performing high schools.

Case study is an ideal methodology to conduct a holistic, in-depth investigation, and the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomenon (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Yin, 2009). It is easy to conclude that students in schools with evidently high levels of collective teacher efficacy, a clear and focused academic press, and trust for stakeholders will outperform schools without the similar variables. However, determining exactly how academic optimism as a

construct, as well as its individual components, are communicated and modeled in schools for sustainability of student achievement is a complex task. The purpose of the research is to provide an in-depth description of why academic optimism matters to student success as well as how it is preserved in high achieving high schools. Thus, I employ case study methodology to flesh out the details of each research site's successes through the viewpoint of the study's participants (e.g., teachers, counselors, and administrators) and analysis of other relevant sources (e.g., school improvement and course enrollment) of data (Tellis, 1997). Stake (2006) contends that case studies are employed because,

> We would like to hear [participants'] stories. [Researchers] may have some reservations about things [participants] tell us, just as they will question some of the things we tell about them. But we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn. (p.1)

Stake (2006) suggests that the investigator become immersed in the research site, effectively categorizing assumptions and biases in order to acquire new details and insight from stories heard and behaviors observed. As a former principal of a large, urban high school, I entered this research study with my own set of assumptions and biases about the factors that contribute to sustaining student success. However, after investigating factors at the various research sites, I acknowledge that the interpretations and practices of academic optimism take on different forms. For example, while all of the research sites practiced remedial or corrective teaching demonstrating an academic press, two of the locations used student or peer tutors to assist others who struggled,

which blended in the facet of stakeholder trust. Thus, I appropriately retired presumptions in an effort to learn how academic optimism and its properties are communicated and modeled across three similar yet distinct school environments.

*Guiding Question*

The aim of this multi-case study was to identify the ways that academic optimism is evident in high performing schools and how collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and families are consistently modeled to influence students' learning outcomes. The following query was developed to steer the investigation.

> How do teachers and administrators in high performing schools understand, foster, and sustain academic optimism, and what is the relationship between their sense of optimism and students' achievement?

*Case Study as a Methodology*

I determined case study as the qualitative methodology best suited for this study on academic optimism because of the extensibility case study research allows in gathering, analyzing, and conceptualizing data. Case studies are generally performed for one of three purposes: "to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007 p. 451). My purpose is description as I attempted to depict and conceptualize a phenomenon, sustained academic optimism within a school, and its influence (or non influence) on students' academic achievement. Case study methodology provided the in-depth study of instances of academic optimism in real-life settings, most importantly, through the perspectives of the participants involved in the phenomenon (2007). Thus,

my depiction focuses on the meanings that the research participants (e.g., teachers, school counselors, and administrators) ascribed to their respective classroom and school environments as well as other factors (e.g., vision, communication, expectations, and parental involvement) that drive their interactions with students, students' families, and each other. I sought to elaborate the *ways* each participant interpreted academic optimism to exist (or not exist) and to influence (or not influence) students' academic success. Case study research afforded the most practical opportunity for such exploration.

*Case Selection*

For the purposes of this study, well performing high schools are identified as those where 90 percent or more of the students achieved a minimal "pass proficient" score on Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) End of Course (EOC) assessments for mathematics (e.g., Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II) and English (e.g., Reading, Language, and Research and Direct Writing). As mentioned in Chapter One, the SOL end-of-course tests are criterion-referenced assessments with score bands ranging from 400-499 for "pass proficient" and 500-600 for "pass advanced". In Virginia's high schools, at least 70 percent of tested students must pass EOCs in mathematics and English in addition to history and science, for full state accreditation. For the 2011-2012 academic year, Virginia adopted new standards and revised the EOC assessments for mathematics resulting in regressed mathematics scores across the state as new trend lines were developed. Therefore, the math scores from the 2010-2011 school year were considered as indicators of high performance in mathematics.

Further, high performing schools are those where students from federally identified subgroups (black students, Hispanic students, students who are economically disadvantaged, students with a disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency [LEP]) demonstrate literacy and numeracy proficiency at rates comparable to all other students. This type of student achievement is indicative of an organizational culture and instructional program that successfully serves all learners. The schools considered for study enrolled a combined minimum of 30 percent of students in Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and/or regional International Baccalaureate (IB) course offerings, indicating an emphasis on academic rigor and higher end curriculum. Lastly, each of the school's Graduate Completer Index (GCI) reached or exceeded 90 indicating an organizational commitment to graduate students within four years of enrollment. In Virginia a minimal GCI of 85 is required for full state accreditation. The GCI awards point values for traditional program graduates (100 points), students who earn a General Educational Development (GED) credential (75 points), students who continue enrollment for a fifth year of high school (70 points), and students who earn a certificate of completion (25 points). No points are designated for students who drop out. The Graduate Completer Index is calculated by dividing the sum of the point values for each student by the total number of students in the cohort during the fall of the ninth grade year (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). As high schools are anticipated to graduate students, the GCI is a significant indicator of schools' success.

Because the research question demands a thorough degree of investigation, I determined a total of three schools to be practical and manageable. Considering the small number of research sites, it was critical that I include schools from across the state. I

managed to adequately do this with sites in the Shenandoah region, the greater Richmond metropolitan area, and Hampton Roads. As state and national achievement standards have cultivated a sense of competition and discretion between schools and school divisions, it had become increasingly difficult to gain the permissions required to conduct adequate research study, particularly when the researcher intended to immerse into a setting. Thus, I used existing relationships, formal and informal, (Yin, 1994; 2009) with school leaders to gain access to schools that were most likely to "illuminate my research questions" (Yin, 2009 p. 42). For example, I needed cases where teachers determined strong levels of academic optimism to exist and where students demonstrated exemplary performance on state assessments. I sent letters via email to principals at six high schools across the state and received two favorable responses. One of those two high schools, Suburban County High, was eventually selected as a research site. The other site had a change in leadership, and the incoming principal was understandably uncomfortable with the study because so many of the interview responses might be based on experiences with previous school leadership. Access to the remaining two schools, College Town High and Historic Battle High, were the result of collegial relationships with the principals at those sites. Anonymity was promised to principals at each of the three research sites, thus aliases are used to reference schools.

### College Town High School

College Town (CTHS), a comprehensive high school, enrolled 1,203 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011) students in grades 9-12. The instructional staff includes 62 teachers in the core content (i.e. English, mathematics, sciences, and social sciences) and core elective areas, 11 special education, five in the visual and performing arts, five

in world languages, three in the military sciences, four in health and physical education, and four in career and technical education (CTE). CTHS staffs six full-time school counselors and one career counselor. The principal's administrative team includes four assistant principals and two deans of students.

College Town High's webpage highlights the school's diversity with a student body comprised of 42 percent African-American, 40 percent white, seven percent Hispanic, and seven percent Asian with four percent of students identified as other. Eleven percent of students have disabilities, 31 percent are identified as economically disadvantaged, and four percent are Limited English Proficient (LEP). Fifty three percent of the College Town's students are female. Demonstrating a press for academics, 261 CTHS students (22 percent) took 619 Advanced Placement examinations with 90 percent earning scores of three or higher; 56 percent achieved AP scores of four or five, qualifying for college credit, during the 2010-2011 school year. Dual enrollment course participation was nearly 11 percent (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

College Town's website exhibits a value for collaboration describing the school's "supportive" Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), highlighting its home to school communications and relationships, and advertising community partnerships with 16 organizations ranging from local restaurants to hospitals. Students at CTHS attend classes in a 4X4 format enrolling in four courses during each semester of the school year. According to the school's principal, the 4X4 scheduling extends opportunities to more quickly build credits toward high school graduation and further affords students the flexibility to seek one-year certification or an associate's degree through dual enrollment opportunities with the area community college demonstrating CTHS's emphasis on

academics. During a preliminary site visit in the spring of 2012, I was extremely impressed with the display of trust in its students through the full-scale implementation of a one-to-one technology initiative, replacing traditional textbooks and testing materials with a Fujitsu tablet. To me, this conveyed trust that students would use the devices as intended for academic purpose despite having potential distraction of constant Internet and communicative messaging accessibility.

## Historic Battle High School

Historic Battle High School (HBHS), located the Hampton Roads region of southeastern Virginia, has an enrollment of under 1100 students in grades 9-12 (VDOE, 2011) and 74 full-time teachers including 39 in core content and core electives, nine special education, six in the visual and performing arts, eight in world languages, six health and physical education, and six CTE. The school's counseling department is comprised of four counselors, who average 370 students each, a high number compared to the other schools studied. The principal and two assistants make up Historic Battle's administrative team. HBHS's students are 17 percent African-American, 71 percent white, four percent Hispanic, and six percent Asian with two percent identifying as other. Nine percent of students have disabilities, 21 percent are identified economically disadvantaged, and six percent Limited English Proficient (LEP), speaking English as a second language. Fifty one percent of Historic Battle High's students are female.

During the 2010-2011 year, 297 students (28 percent) enrolled in advanced placement courses; 416 (38 percent) enrolled in a minimum of one honors level course. Historic Battle High indicates that 74 percent of its AP testers earned qualifying scores of 3, 4, or 5, depending on university requirements, making HBHS an ideal research site.

While HBHS has the highest rate of Advanced Placement participation of the schools studied, it had the lowest Dual Enrollment numbers with only 16 students, less than two percent, enrolling. Conversely, nearly five percent of students enrolled in International Baccalaureate (IB) offerings (VDOE, 2011). HBHS's Graduate Completer Index of 93 is one of the highest in its geographic region. Historic Battle High operates on an A-B block schedule with students attending courses on alternating days for the duration of the school year. The school's website indicates strong Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) and references its partnerships with local businesses and civic organizations. Student athletes at HBHS achieved the Claudia Dodson Wells Fargo Sportsmanship, Ethics, and Integrity Award for 2012.

**Suburban County High School**

With 1,607 students, Suburban County High is the largest but least ethnically diverse of the three research sites. The SCHS student body is 7 percent African-American, 84 percent white, 1 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Asian. Five percent of students are identified as belonging to other races. Thirteen percent of students have disabilities, and nearly 20 percent are economically disadvantaged (VDOE, 2011). Though SCHS was the least demographically diverse research site, primarily without low SES or significant percentages of ethnic minority students, the location firmly met each of the other achievement criteria.

The instructional staff at Suburban County High includes 74 teachers in core content and core electives, 11 special education, four in the visual and performing arts, six in world languages, six in health and physical education, and seven in career and technical education. SCHS has 6 full-time school counselors and one career counselor.

Administratively, there are three assistant principals, a senior teacher, and a senior teacher for special education.

Though SCHS had the overall highest achievement data and GCI of the three selected schools, the school exhibited the lowest AP enrollment as 19 percent of students took advantage of the offerings during the 2010-2011 school year. However, as an International Baccalaureate world school that awards IB Diplomas, SCHS's IB enrollment is13 percent, significantly higher than the Virginia average of four percent (VDOE, 2011). While Suburban County High has the lowest upper-level course enrollment of the three sites, its students performed better in English and mathematics than those at the other sites and scored over 10 percentage points better than the state average in both areas qualifying it, by definition for this study, as a high performing high school.

| | Staff | Students | Econ. Disadv. | Black | Hispanic | Asian | Non-White Other | Students with Disabilities | Limited English Proficient |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| College Town | 107 | 1,203 | 31% | 42% | 7% | 7% | 4% | 11% | 4% |
| Historic Battle | 81 | 1,087 | 21% | 17% | 4% | 6% | 2% | 9% | 6% |
| Suburban County | 120 | 1,607 | 18% | 7% | 1% | 3% | 5% | 13% | * |
| Virginia Average | | 1,221 | 32% | 24% | 6% | 6% | 8% | 14% | <1% |

*No data reported (VDOE, 2011)

**Table 3.1** Research site demographics

| Site | Mathematics | English | GCI | AP Enrollment | Dual Enrollment | IB or Governor's School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| College Town | 90 | 94 | 90 | 22% | 11% | * |
| Historic Battle | 94 | 96 | 93 | 28% | < 2% | 5% |
| Suburban County | 98 | 97 | 97 | 19% | * | 13% |
| Virginia | 87 | 88 | 87 | 19% | 6% | 4% |

*No data reported (VDOE, 2011)

**Table 3.2** Academic performance & advanced course enrollments

*Selection of Interview Participants*

The participants at the three-research sites were identified with the help of a gatekeeper (Hatch, 2002; Glesne, 2011). I determined principals to be logical choices as gatekeepers as they were knowledgeable of and presumably held trusting relationships with prospective study participants. Virginia's Department of Education disaggregates school and subgroup data as well as awards school accreditation based on students' achievement in the core content areas of mathematics, English (Reading and Writing), science, and history. As the aims of this study were to identify organizational factors that contribute to student success and explain how high performing high schools sustain achievement, it was important to understand the interpretations of teachers in these content areas. The principals selected teachers who met the criteria and initially solicited their participation with the study. Because school counseling departments potentially promote academic optimism, particularly academic emphasis and trust between school and home, I also asked principals to seek a member of their guidance departments for interview participation. Collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents are all influenced, directly or indirectly, by school leadership, and it was essential to speak with an assistant principal from each school. In total 18 participants, six from each school, were interviewed. Participants averaged 15 years in teaching with service ranging from two to 34 years in the field. Participants also averaged nine years, with a range of two to 23, in their current schools (See Table 3.3). This is important as it suggests established familiarity with the schools' organizational norms and practices, demographics, and greater community. The principals scheduled a visit where I could explain the purpose of the study as well as participants' individual

roles. To maintain anonymity, interview participants were advised that they would be referred to by pseudonym during the interviews and in data reporting. As importantly, participants were informed of their right to cancel their participation at any time during the study. For clarity, these key points were reiterated at the start of each actual interview.

Agreements with participating school divisions included that site visits and participant interviews did not disrupt the normal operation of the instructional day. Therefore, I coordinated the interview schedule with principals/gatekeepers based on staff's regularly scheduled time without students (e.g., planning or school improvement periods, or before or after school if the participant preferred) and worked to conclude interviews within those frames. When interviews were interrupted due to time, I requested that those participants return at the end of the school day to conclude. This happened twice, and thankfully both participants were willing to finish interviews during a second segment. As gatekeepers, principals were not present during direct interviews or field observations; however, the researcher did rely on principals to obtain school documents for analysis.

**College Town High School**

| Participant Pseudonym | Assignment | Total Years in Teaching | Total Years at CTHS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mr. Downs | Geometry/Statistics | 8 | 6 |
| Ms. Pratt | English 11 | 8 | 6 |
| Ms. Garrity | School Counselor | 12 | 12 |
| Ms. Lee | Chemistry | 7 | 2 |
| Mr. Grey | Government | 2 | 2 |
| Ms. Good | Assistant Principal | 14 | 2 |
| | **Averages** | **9** | **5** |

**Historic Battle High**

| Participant Pseudonym | Assignment | Total Years in Teaching | Total Years at HBHS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mr. Reed | Algebra II | 11 | 2 |
| Ms. Santos | Chemistry | 23 | 23 |
| Ms. Tatum | English 11/12 | 27 | 23 |
| Ms. Canty | Government | 34 | 20 |
| Ms. Laverty | School Counselor | 21 | 9 |
| Ms. Austin | Assistant Principal | 11 | 5 |
| | **Averages** | **21** | **14** |

**Suburban County High School**

| Participant Pseudonym | Assignment | Total Years in Teaching | Total Years at SCHS |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mr. Brahm | AP Calc/IB Math | 9 | 8 |
| Ms. Tilden | English 11 | 13 | 2 |
| Ms. Charles | Geography/US History | 10 | 10 |
| Ms. McCrary | Biology | 13 | 7 |
| Mr. Henry | Assistant Principal | 30 | 11 |
| Ms. Jacobs | School Counselor | 26 | 10 |
| | **Averages** | **17** | **8** |
| | **Sample Averages** | **15** | **9** |

**Table 3.3** Interview participants

*Data Collection Techniques*

As previously mentioned, initial data were collected from each site through its participation in a pilot study during the fall of 2011. Hoy's Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools was used as a survey tool during the pilot. For this subsequent study, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and document analysis. Dicks et al. (as cited in Glesne, 2011) posit that data recording is a more appropriate term as data are not "simply inert materials lying around in a field, waiting for the researcher to come along and 'collect' them" (p.47). I interpret this to

mean that the interview process, most specifically when semi-structured or unstructured, produces rich, unanticipated data as each participant's responses develop from their unique perspectives and experiences. I wanted to explore their interpretations and examples of facets of academic optimism through listening to the accounts of the interview participants. Glesne (2011) also asserts that in qualitative study, the researcher has an active role in generating or producing the data they record through the questions they ask and the social interactions in which they participate. With this in mind, I worked to maintain authentic interactions and build trust during interviews and observations. I wanted to learn how each participant truthfully interpreted academic optimism and gain their candid assessments of how, if at all, collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and their families were exhibited within their respective schools.

*Pilot Testing.* In order to initially assess the level of academic optimism of the instructional faculties as well as to develop the participant interview questions, Hoy's (2005) Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools (SAOS) was distributed to teachers at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting at two of the three research sites during the fall of 2011. The principal at the third site asked that surveys be sent to the school for completion and returned to me, also during the fall of 2011. Analyzed as a field test for this study, the SAOS is a 30 question, two-part instrument with items one-22 measured using a six-point Likert scale ranging from *"strongly disagree"* to *"strongly agree"* and items 23-30 using a five-point scale spanning from *"rarely occurs"* to *"very often occurs"*. Table 3.4 details the survey items posed to participants while Table 3.5 describes how the items are calculated to achieve standard scores for collective teacher

efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust of students and parents as well as a total score for academic optimism.

| Survey Item- Scaled *"Strongly Disagree"* to *"Strongly Agree"* | AO Property |
|---|---|
| Teachers in this school are able to get through to the most difficult students. | CE |
| Teachers here are confident that they will be able to motivate their students. | CE |
| If a child here doesn't want to learn, teachers here give up. | CE |
| Teachers here don't have the skills to produce meaningful results. | CE |
| Teachers in this school believe that every child can learn. | CE |
| These students come to school ready to learn. | CE |
| Home life provides so many advantages that students are bound to learn. | CE |
| Student's here just aren't motivated to learn. | CE |
| Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems. | CE |
| The opportunities in this community help ensure that these students will learn. | CE |
| Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety. | CE |
| Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here. | CE |
| Teachers in this school trust their students. | FT |
| Teachers in this school trust the parents. | FT |
| Students in this school care about each other. | FT |
| Parents in this school are reliable in their commitments. | FT |
| Students in this school can be counted upon to do their work. | FT |
| Teachers can count upon parental support. | FT |
| Teachers here believe that students are competent learners. | FT |
| Teachers think that most of the parents do a good job. | FT |
| Teachers can believe what parents tell them. | FT |
| Students here are secretive. | FT |

| Survey Item- Scaled *"Rarely Occurs"* to *"Very Often Occurs"* | AO Property |
|---|---|
| The school sets high standards for performance. | AE |
| Students respect others who get good grades. | AE |
| Students seek extra work so that they can get good grades. | AE |
| Academic achievement is recognized and acknowledged by the school. | AE |
| Students try hard to improve on previous work. | AE |
| The learning environment is orderly and serious. | AE |
| The students in this school can achieve the goals that have been set for them. | AE |
| Teachers in this school believe that their students have the ability to achieve academically. | AE |

CE= Collective Teacher Efficacy, FT= Trust in Students and Parents, AE= Academic Emphasis (Hoy, 2005)

**Table 3.4** Survey of academic optimism of schools (Hoy, 2005)

The standard scores for each component were calculated as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Standard Score for Collective Efficacy (SSCE)** | [100X(CE-3.96)/.33]+500 |
| **Standard Score for Faculty Trust (SSFT)** | [100X(T-3.65)/.39]+500 |
| **Standard Score for Academic Emphasis (SSAE)** | [100X(AE-2.75).26]+500 |
| **The Total Academic Optimism Score** | [(SSCE)+(SSFT)+(SSAE)] divided by 3 |

**Table 3.5** Calculations for academic optimism scores- secondary schools

A school's overall academic optimism score is interpreted by comparing its score with those from a typical set of schools. Using the formulas mentioned above, the scores have been standardized such that the mean for a typical school is 500. According to Hoy (2005), a score of 650 would represent a highly optimistic school while a score of 350 displays a pessimistic view of academic optimism. Naturally, scores for most schools fall between the extremes, and the range and interpretation is based upon normal distribution (Hoy, 2005). Table 3.6 summarizes each site's sub scores for collective teacher efficacy (SSCE), faculty trust (SSFT), and academic emphasis (SSAE) as well as overall score for academic optimism. Table 3.7 summarizes score interpretations.

| Site | SSCE (Collective Efficacy) | SSFT (Faculty Trust) | SSAE (Academic Emphasis) | Total Academic Optimism |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **College Town** | 622.12 | 620 | 483.85 | **575.32** |
| **Historic Battle** | 561.82 | 555.9 | 586.54 | **568.09** |
| **Suburban County** | 638.79 | 622.56 | 594.31 | **618.55** |
| **Means** | **607.58** | **599.49** | **554.9** | **587.32** |

**Table 3.6** Academic optimism scores for research sites

| Range | Interpretation |
|---|---|
| 300 | Lower than 97% of the schools |
| 500 | Average |
| 700 | Higher than 97% of the schools |

**Table 3.7** Interpretations of academic optimism scores

*Interviews.* Direct interviews were semi-structured as I asked a series of prepared questions but, based on the participants' responses, probed more deeply with follow up questions to acquire more extensive information. This type of informal conversational interview as described by Gall et al. (2007), involves "on-the-spot formulation of [follow up] questions based on a general plan and the interviewer's reading of relevant characteristics of each respondent (e.g., level of poise, talkativeness)" (p. 249). A teacher from each of the four core content areas (English, mathematics, science, and social studies), an assistant principal, and one school counselor were separately interviewed. Though none were requested, participants were offered the opportunity to be interviewed away from the school site during evening or weekend hours. Interviews were designed to last forty-five minutes with teachers and a half hour to forty-five minutes with school counselors and assistant principals. As mentioned, to maintain their anonymity, participants were referred by pseudonym during the interview and in following reports. Audio from each interview was recorded.

Participant interview questions were designed to allow respondents to answer in the "context of dispositions (e.g., individual motives, values, concerns, and needs) that the researcher needed to unravel in order to gain an understanding of the stories being shared' (Glesne, 2011 p. 102). For example, participants were asked to discuss the ways

their schools support a sense of community with students and teachers. This question afforded each participant an opportunity to convey his or her interpretation of community as well as individual values for communications, partnerships, and trust. The participant might have used this as a chance to extend ideas about practices that are not already in place but might advance a sense of community and trust in the school.

Using my conceptual framework outlined in Chapter One (Figure 1.1), I developed an interview protocol consisting of 16 questions distributed according to the three properties of academic optimism: collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents. Figure 3.1 provides a sampling of how questions were categorized.

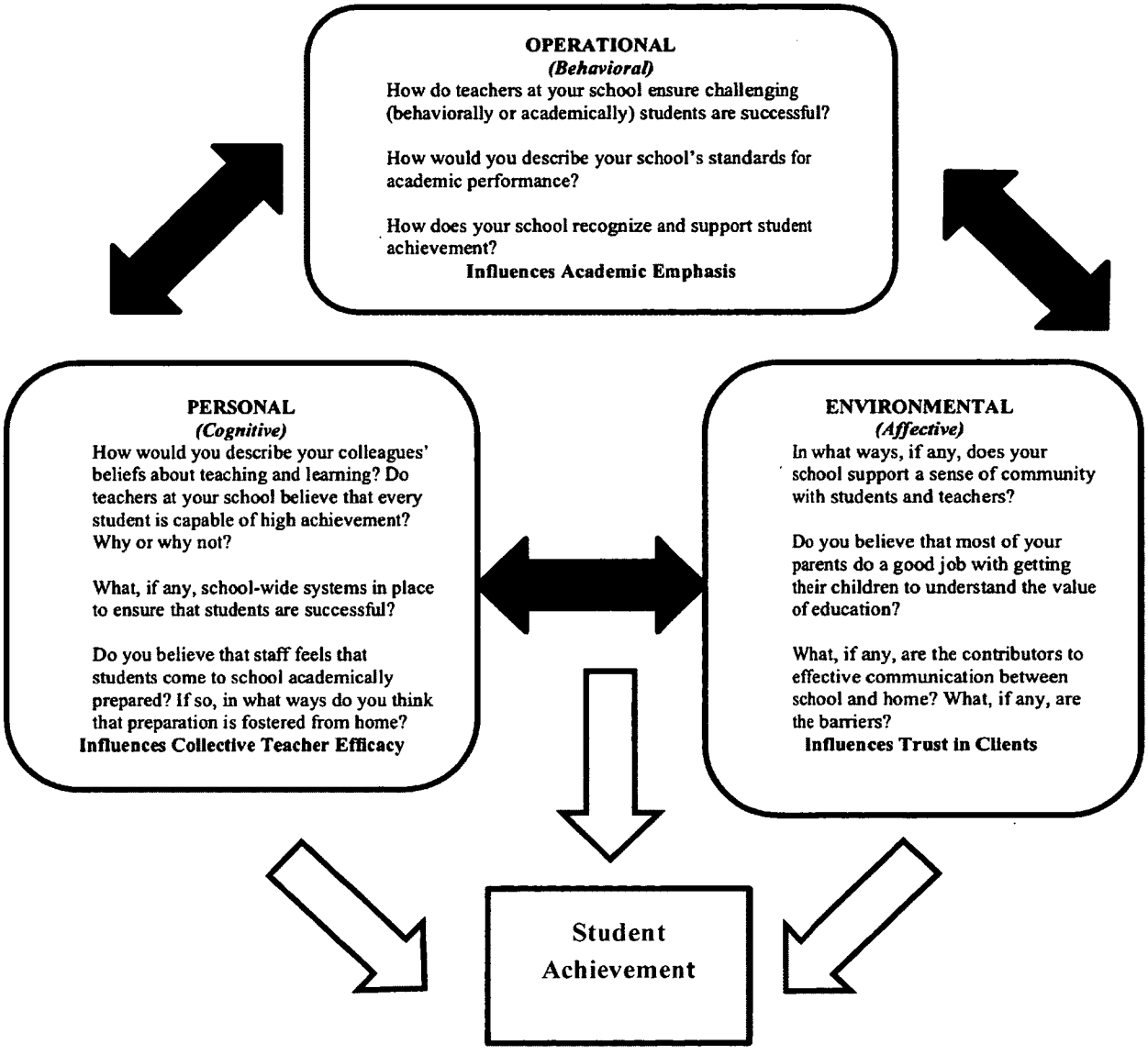



**Figure 3.1** Sample of research questions developed through the conceptual framework

Interview questions were designed to be broad in nature allowing participants to openly convey their interpretations of each property as well as their perceptions of how a specific tenet of academic optimism exists or does not exist in their schools. This method

of questioning allowed the researcher to avoid leading participants to particular outcomes. To ensure that I had given each participant an opportunity to completely share his or her perceptions and stories, I concluded every interview with a chance for the participant to provide any additional information, which they felt was important but may not have developed through our conversation. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) suggest, "The formulation of good questions in interviews depends heavily on the interviewer's ability to think on his feet during the interview" (p. 249). In my case, I attempted such "thinking on my feet" through intensive listening and informed follow up questioning ensuring that I had gained as rich detail as possible during conversations. Interviews are a critical component of case study research, and the information obtained from the my dialogues with teachers, counselors, and administrators greatly contributed to the story of how those successful schools cultivate and sustain academic optimism.

*Participant Observations*. Twelve observations, four at each research site, were conducted as part of this study. During participant observations, I wanted to note regular, natural classroom interactions between teachers and students. Specifically, I sought evidence, in real time, to support the staff's assessment of levels of academic optimism as indicated by the SAOS and reflected through interview data. I acknowledged that as a researcher "[my] observer stance [could] make [me] and others feel as if [I was] a spy of sorts, while [my] participants' stance [could] indicate a closeness or involvement that may be suspect because of [my] role as the researcher (and observer)" (Glesne, 2011, p. 64). Observations were conducted in four classroom settings at each site, and none of the teachers who served as interview participants were observed. Though teachers and students knew that I was there to collect data for a research study, they remained

completely unaware of my specific investigation, and thus were unable to script or purposefully exhibit behaviors to suit my research. I was able to see how students and teachers engaged during instructional time and gained what I believe to be an accurate depiction of typical classroom interactions at each of the three schools. Table 3.8 describes the class sections observed during the study. Though the content areas and numbers of students are accurately reflected, pseudonyms are again used to reference faculty members.

| College Town High School | Historic Battle High School | Suburban County High School |
|---|---|---|
| [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Shaw, H. World History II | Ms. Hoggard, French I | Mr. Lane, Math Analysis |
| [redacted] | [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Sparrow, Earth Science | Ms. Burnett, AP Enviro. Science | Mr. Lowter, Band |

**Table 3.8** Participant observations

The focus of a qualitative researcher's observation is likely to shift from the early to the later stages of the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Merriam, 1998). According to James Spradley (as cited in Gall et al., 2007, p. 278), this process of shifting typically includes three stages:

> The *descriptive stage*, when observations tend to be unfocused and general in scope, providing a base from which the observer can branch out in many directions;
>
> The *focused stage*, when the observer has identified features of the phenomena under study that that are of the greatest interest and begin to direct their attention to collecting deeper information about this range of features; and

The *selective stage*, when research questions or problems have been defined and the observer's focus shifts to refining and deepening their understanding of the specific elements that have emerged as theoretically or empirically most essential.

Because I entered the classroom settings at the *focused stage,* seeking evidence to support data that had already been gathered, my aim was to gain insight on instructional and management practices and teacher-student interactions that contribute to sustaining academic optimism within the contexts of how the phenomenon had been described by participants. For example, if interviewed teachers suggested a high level of student voice as a contributor to academic emphasis or faculty trust, I sought evidence of such voice during the observations.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory argues that people, in this case high school students, learn from observing role models in day-to-day life, and that modeling influences learning primarily through its informative functions. In classrooms students retain a symbolic representation of modeled behavior, which then acts as a blueprint for the desired conduct (Bandura, 1977). Relative to academic optimism, a teacher who models his belief in his ability to positive affect student learning may likely in turn instill the belief in students that they can achieve at high levels. Additionally, a teacher who clearly and consistently communicates her value for academics may foster the similar values in the students she teaches. Motivational processes explain that people usually display behaviors that seem to be effective for others and "they are more likely to adopt modeled behavior if it results in outcomes they value than if it has unrewarding or punishing effects" (Bandura, 1977, p. 28). Thus the goal of the observations was to determine how teachers' modeling and communication of efficacy, academic press, and

trust contribute to a classroom and school culture that sustains student success. Details gathered from observing teacher-student interaction in the instructional setting assisted in assessing how staff interprets academic optimism and helped draw conclusions on how their interpretations of optimism influence their students' academic success.

*Document Analysis*. Qualitative researchers often study written communications found in natural situations (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). There are numerous school records (e.g., school mission statement, improvement plans, course enrollment worksheets, school correspondences) that are significant in interpreting the level of academic optimism as they reflect an organization's expectations of students (efficacy), emphasis on communication, which is a trust builder, and other identified areas for organizational growth (Hoy et al., 2006). For the purposes of this study, it is important to extend the critical information attained from documents or records and interpret how it is used to foster collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and/or faculty trust in students and parents. For example, a school's mission statement typically conveys purpose and values and may capture a sense of collective teacher efficacy when describing anticipated student or organizational outcomes (Slate et al., 2008). Further, mission statements can be methods of communicating a school's emphasis on academics as well as its value for family and community partnerships, variables of trust in students and parents (2008). For example, the number of students enrolled in challenging courses (e.g., honors or Advanced Placement) may be an indicator of the school's emphasis on high academic expectations by challenging students through rigorous learning experiences. Table 3.9 outlines the interview protocol and other data sources analyzed during the study.

| Direct Interview Questions (Participants) | Observations & Document Analysis |
|---|---|
| **Collective Teacher Efficacy**<br>1. How would you describe your colleagues' beliefs about teaching and learning? Do teachers at your school believe that every student is capable of high achievement? Why or why not?<br>2. How do teachers at your school ensure challenging (behaviorally or academically) students are successful?<br>3. What, if any, school-wide systems in place to ensure that students are successful?<br>4. Do you believe that staff feels that students come in school academically prepared? If so, in what ways do you think that preparation is fostered from home?<br>5. How would you assess the meaningfulness and overall applicability of staff development initiatives? | **Observation**<br>• Communicated beliefs) in student success<br>• Classroom interactions that indicate effective productive relationships<br>• Authentic student engagement in the instructional setting<br><br>**Document Analysis**<br>• School mission statement<br>• Current school improvement strategic plan |
| **Academic Emphasis**<br>1. How would you describe your school's standards for academic performance?<br>2. How do you know when a student is committed to performing well academically? How would you describe students' beliefs in getting good grades?<br>3. In what ways, if any, is the value for instructional time communicated throughout the school? What, if any, norms exist to exhibit an organizational value for time?<br>4. How does your school recognize and support student achievement?<br>5. Is there open enrollment for honors and Advanced Placement sections of courses? What are your perceptions of the school's AP and dual enrollment programs? Regional Governor's School participation?<br>6. What, if any, opportunities do students have to integrate their learning? | **Observation**<br>• Questioning techniques in the instructional setting<br>• Practices that acknowledge student success<br>• Integration of learning (across the content areas)<br>• Authentic student engagement in the instructional setting<br><br>**Document Analysis**<br>• School mission statement<br>• Bell schedule (emphasis and use of instructional time)<br>• Current school improvement plan<br>• Course enrollment data |
| **Faculty Trust in Students and Parents**<br>1. In what ways, if any, does your school support a sense of community with students and teachers?<br>2. How would you describe your partnerships with parents? School-wide partnerships with parents?<br>3. Do you believe that most of your parents do a good job with getting their children to understand the value of education?<br>4. Do teachers in this school trust their students? If so, how is that trust exhibited?<br>5. What, if any, are the contributors to effective communication between school and home? What, if any, are the barriers? | **Observation**<br>• Student-led discussion in the instructional setting<br>• Students' collaborative work in instructional setting<br>• Customer service and other variables that create a welcoming environment to parents<br><br>**Document Analyses**<br>• School Family Partnerships (Analysis of PTO documents)<br>• Clientele survey data if applicable<br>• Communicative technologies… automated phone message delivery, marquee, email, newsletters, school websites, etc. |

**Table 3.9** Data collection sources

*Data Analysis*

*Interviews*. My research afforded the chance to hear many fascinating stories from teachers offering their interpretations of academic optimism and how their schools promote collective teacher efficacy, an emphasis on academics, and trust to sustain students' success. Because I was fortunate to gather so many firsthand accounts, I needed a method of logically organizing what I had heard and seen to make sense of the experiences from each site. Relying on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter One as a compass for categorizing relationships among data (Gibbs, 2007 p. 75), I determined thematic analysis to be the best process of interpreting data for meaning. Thematic analysis, which focuses analytical techniques on searching through data for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011), relies heavily on data coding to draw such patterns and relationships.

*Coding the Interviews*

My initial approach to analysis was to employ open coding to broadly examine individual interviews for elements of academic optimism: collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents. From this procedure I was able to establish an initial code arrangement (e.g., student self-advocacy, sense of community, remediation or corrective teaching opportunities) reflecting the details of each interview. Once individual interviews had been analyzed and coded for meaning, I sought to make connections among participants' stories within a single school site through axial coding, disaggregating data by themes. For example, a common thought among participants at a particular school was peer tutoring for struggling students. Such tutoring initiatives were conveyed within the context of pressing all students to master

content (academic emphasis) and faculty trust for students as struggling learners had to arrange their respective tutoring meetings outside of school hours and hold their commitments to attend. When themes (axial codes) were established for each research site, I again refined the categorizations through the process of selective coding exploring themes across the three schools searching for: "What is being illuminated? How the stories [collectively] connect? And what themes and patterns give shape to the data?" (Glesne, 2011, p. 194). Figure 3.2 below conceptualizes the thematic analysis process.

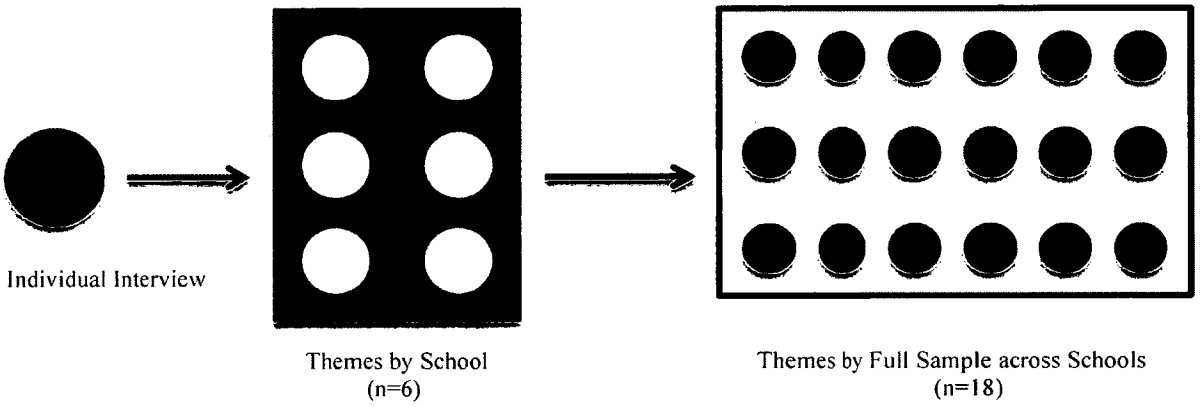



**Figure 3.2** Diagram of units of analysis for interview data

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) suggest that a good depiction will develop what is called a "thick description of the phenomenon, that is, statements that re-create a situation and as much of its context as possible, accompanied by the meanings and intentions inherent in that situation" (p. 451). Identifying themes, broad and specific, across cases allowed for such thick description, establishing constructs that brought order to the descriptive data and connected those data to other findings reported in the research literature (2007).

*College Town High School*

Interviews at CTHS's produced 127 (many duplicated across respondents) examples of academic optimism. The 127 individual examples were then grouped as representations of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and/or faculty trust in students and parents. Subsequently, a list of examples, the recurring themes across individual interviews, was developed categorizing College Town High School's 27 most common themes: nine for collective teacher efficacy, 10 for academic emphasis, and 8 for faculty trust in students and parents (See Table 3.10).

| Collective Teacher Efficacy | Academic Emphasis | Faculty Trust in Students & Parents |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher ability to make a difference in student achievement | Academic and social expectations are posted | Members (faculty, students, families) assume the best of each other |
| Principal maintains positive climate | Student intervention programs (i.e., AVID) | Classrooms operate as communities |
| Collegiality and teamwork | Open access to higher-level courses (i.e., honors, AP, IB) | Parents are viewed as responsive and supportive |
| Mentorship for new faculty | Opportunities for remediation, corrective teaching | Faculty cares about students as individuals |
| Quality staff development | University partnerships for internships, tutoring | Citizenship is valued and promoted |
| Parental support | Awards and incentives | Faculty supports students at school events |
| Teachers view students as capable of high achievement | | Students are self advocates |
| Teachers view students as prepared | | School maintains regular communication |
| Teachers view students as motivated | | |

**Table 3.10** Categorizations (axial codes) from individual interviews at CTHS

*Historic Battle High School*

Analysis of HBHS's participant interviews produced 99 total examples of academic optimism. It is again important to convey that the total number of examples includes responses that were duplicated over multiple interviews. For example, five of Historic Battle's six participants mentioned the schools' process for assigning peer tutors.

Rather than counting peer tutoring as one example of academic emphasis, the researcher counts it five as interviews were individually analyzed and themes found among interviews to capture the perceptions of the school or faculty. This process of analysis was defined in conceptualized in Figure 3.2. As with interview data from College Town High, Historic Battle's 99 references to academic optimism were categorized into 23 larger constructs. As Table 3.11 displays below, there are nine themes for collective teacher efficacy, seven for academic emphasis, and seven for faculty trust in students and parents.

| Collective Teacher Efficacy | Academic Emphasis | Faculty Trust in Students & Parents |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers make a positive difference in students' lives | High academic expectations for all students | Students and parents viewed as partners |
| Collegiality and teamwork | Open enrollment for advanced courses | School has a good community reputation |
| Working for continuous school improvement | Student collaboration (academics) outside of school | Emphasis on relationships |
| Relevant and practical staff development | Teacher availability during non-school hours | Students affiliate with the school |
| Students viewed as capable of high achievement | Emphasis on college and career readiness | Students self advocate |
| Teachers are supported to try new ideas | Orderly and productive school environment | Faculty trusts each other |
| Teachers are supported in discipline matters | Teachers exhibit a degree of academic autonomy | Timely communication exists |
| Principal leadership | | |
| Teachers believe that every student can and will learn | | |

**Table 3.11** Categorizations (axial codes) from individual interviews at HBHS

*Suburban County High School*

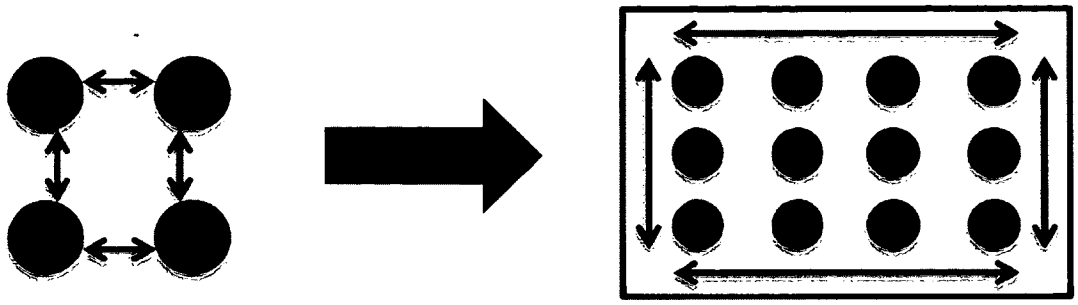
Interviews at Suburban County High produced 93 citations of academic optimism. As with the other sites, this number represents those examples replicated among participants as well as those instances suggested as examples of more than one property of academic optimism. For example, an orderly learning environment might have been suggested to contribute to collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and or faculty

trust in students. In such an event, maintaining an orderly learning environment was considered as two to three examples of academic optimism rather than one. Table 3.12 illustrates, the 21 themes derived from the original 93 faculty interview examples: eight for collective teacher efficacy, nine for academic emphasis, and four for faculty trust in students and parents.

| Collective Teacher Efficacy | Academic Emphasis | Faculty Trust in Students & Parents |
|---|---|---|
| Principal leadership promotes morale and positive climate | Recognition of student achievement | Faculty trusts each other |
| Opportunities for collaborative planning and work | Interventions for struggling students | View students and parents as partners |
| Emphasis on continuous school improvement | Extending real-world learning opportunities | Students' extracurricular affiliation with the school |
| Teachers' belief and support for each other | High academic expectations | Open, honest communication |
| Parents viewed as supportive | Reliance on student data | |
| Students viewed as ready for learning | Open access to higher-level courses | |

**Table 3.12** Categorizations (axial codes) from individual interviews at SCHS

*Participant Observations.* Observational field notes should include clear references to participants and their social organization (i.e., how students are arranged or assigned seating), interactions, routines, interpretations, and the setting (i.e., physical space, context, and permitted, encouraged, or prevented behaviors) as well as subtle factors including informal or unplanned activity and nonverbal communication (Denzin, 1989; Merriam, 1998). Similar to the analysis of interview data, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis drawing patterns and connections between various settings within and among the research sites. These patterns and relationships are illustrated in Figure 3.3.



*Patterns between observations at each school (n=4)*

*Patterns among observations across three schools (n=12)*

**Figure 3.3** Diagram of units of analysis for observation data

*Document Analysis.* The researcher typically begins by identifying documents and records that are representative of the phenomenon being studied and determining which materials might be relevant to addressing the research questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The following school documents and records are relevant to this study on academic optimism, as they reflect organizational purpose, strategic improvement initiatives, commitment to expose students to challenging content, and student achievement outcomes.

- **School values, vision, and mission statements** were evaluated for themes of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and families. Additionally, the schools' emphasis on community partnerships was also examined as a factor of academic optimism.
- **School Improvement Initiatives** were examined in search of patterns connecting organizational goals, initiatives, and practices across the three schools. Figure 3.4 diagrams the linear comparison process for evaluating

schools' mission statements, improvement plans, and course enrollment reports.

- **Course enrollment reports** indicate the exposure students have to higher end curricula. For example, each of the three schools in this study employed some type of open enrollment practice allowing all students the opportunity to attempt honors or AP leveled courses regardless or prior academic achievement. As importantly, most students with non-severe special needs (i.e., specific learning disabilities, emotional disabilities) are instructed in inclusion settings alongside all other students. Such enrollment practice could be reflective of high teacher efficacy and academic emphasis and might also influence faculty trust in students.

In qualitative research, the analysis procedure is likely to be evolving as the study continues. According to Gall and his colleagues (2007), "The same document or record can be analyzed at different points in the study, with each analysis yielding new constructs, hypotheses, and insights" (p. 292). Gall further suggests that the researcher take into account variations in meanings as they are studied across space, time, and cultures (2007).

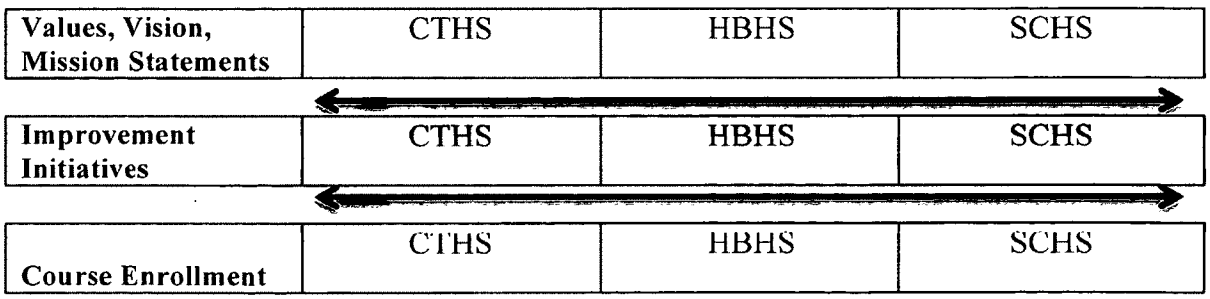



**Figure 3.4** Diagram of units of analysis for document/record data

*Ethical Considerations*

Research for this study was conducted in full compliance with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Institutional Review Board (Education Internal Review Committee) of the College of William and Mary. Because interview questions may have led participants to offer value judgments about their colleagues or the schools at which they worked, participants were offered the opportunity to be interviewed at an off campus location or by telephone. Every precaution was taken to ensure that interview participants were comfortable, and all interviewees were aware that they could cancel or delay their participation at their discretion. At no point during the study were students interviewed directly. Rather, data from students was acquired exclusively through observation of their interactions with teachers in the instructional setting.

*Limitations and Delimitations of the Study*

Data for this qualitative case study were collected from a convenience sample of three Virginia public high schools. While numerous attempts were made to attain a more random collection of research sites better symbolizing students from varying geographic, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds, the researcher ultimately relied on existing relationships, formal and informal, with field colleagues for site access. School administrator and teacher participation were voluntary, and as such, the outcomes of the collective case study may not prove representative of every public high school in Virginia. Pilot test data were collected through administering Hoy's (2005) Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools (SAOS) to initially assess teachers' perceptions of academic optimism within their organizations. The study assumes that every participant offered an honest response to each survey item, and further acknowledges that

participants' responses may have been influenced by interactions and events specific to the day on which the survey was administered.

The study focused exclusively on the relationships between the individual and collective properties of academic optimism and student achievement outcomes as qualified by Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) performance in English and mathematics scores, Completer Graduate Index (GCI), percentages of students enrolled in Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual enrollment, and regional Governor's School programs. It is clearly understood that other variables that are not considered in the case study may disconcert the results. Furthermore, the study recognizes that the Virginia SOL assessments reflect minimal competency and that student performance on SOL assessments are indicative of skills and content knowledge acquired throughout school rather than merely at the high school level. Finally, other documented contributors to student's academic success such as demographics, SES, students' prior achievement, teacher experience, and class sizes were neither investigated nor controlled.

# CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS

*Every philosophical problem, when it is subjected to the necessary analysis and justification, is found either to be not really philosophical at all, or else to be, in the sense in which we are using the word, logical.*

~Bertrand Russell

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers and administrators in well performing high schools understand, foster, and sustain academic optimism and to determine relationships between academic optimism and students' achievement. I employed case study methodology to research academic optimism at three well performing Virginia high schools, which were identified using state assessment and enrollment data from the Virginia Department of Education. Additionally, Hoy's Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools (2005) was used in a pilot to assess the academic optimism of the faculties of the schools involved in the study. This chapter will outline the findings of the study.

Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) acknowledge that many of the external forces that impact schooling such as SES and demographics exist beyond the general control of educators. Nonetheless, the research literature presented along with the findings of this investigation suggest that optimistic practices that foster teacher's sense of collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard 2001; Goddard & Goddard 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) along with the organization's emphasis on academics (Lee & Bryk, 1989; Hoy et al., 1998; Hoy et al., 2002; Hoy et al., 2006) and a commitment to trusting relationships (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998, 2000; Goddard et al., 2001) yield positive student achievement outcomes regardless of uncontrollable

external forces. The next sections of this chapter detail faculty understandings and perceptions of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust of students and parents as well as those organizational practices that foster academic optimism at each of the three studied schools.

## College Town High School

### *Collective Teacher Efficacy at CTHS*

Results from the Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools (Hoy, 2005) reveal College Town High School's total academic optimism score as 575.32 with a much higher sub score of 622.12 for collective efficacy. As mentioned in Chapter Three (Table 3.5), scores have been standardized such that the mean score for a typical school is 500. Thus, the faculty at College Town High holds more favorable perceptions of their collective efficacy than the faculties at over 85% of schools in the norming sample. Specific examples of collective teacher efficacy are found in Appendix A.

| Participant Pseudonym | Assignment |
|---|---|
| [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Pratt | English 11 |
| [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Lee | Chemistry |
| [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Good | Assistant Principal |

**Table 4.1** Interview participants at College Town High School

Illustrating positive faculty perceptions of collective teacher efficacy at CTHS, Mr. Grey, a second year Government teacher, discussed his understanding of how environmental factors such as student demographics and levels of parental involvement can influence school operations, behaviors, and teacher beliefs and attitudes:

> Well when I got into [teaching]...I mean, I'm from an area where there is a lot of brokenness, and so for me... (extended pause), I'm very aware of what that

means. So, I try to meet [students] and the intersection of pain and brokenness and hope and possibility. Because that's where I feel like transformation happens. And for me and where my [teaching] skills are right now, I think that outlook is best for working with students in the classroom. I don't know how familiar you are with this school, but the community describes it as two schools in one. From the inside... I don't think that's true. I don't think that other teachers think it's true. You have extreme poverty and extreme wealth, and so what happens is that those two groups don't always interact as much. So now we have an advisory period to bridge those gaps and help with relationship building between students. As teachers... we also make those kinds of... connections with all of our students, not just those we have in class... For me personally, when I see that a relationship has been established... you know I teach students where there is a lot of parental involvement, and I have those where there is no involvement at all. The relationship matters to both of those groups. It matters to how much they will give in class, how much they put into assignments, their attendance.

Mr. Grey's commentary conveys his conception that very much of what happens to sustain optimism at College Town High derives from a more generally shared understanding of the school's students and geographic community and how those elements contribute to the school's identified purpose shaping organizational climate, norms, and beliefs. This idea was again exemplified through comments from Ms. Garrity, one of the school's counselors:

I really think that one of the best [practices] we have at [College Town High School] is to be continuously responsive... We are responsive our students,

> [who] have very different needs. There are some [students] who armed with all they need to make it. But most come in each day with something missing. Whether it's socioeconomic or a family issue we have things in place to help us respond. And those [practices] aren't just guidance counseling things... They are things we all commit to in support of students' academic, social, and sometimes even physical wellbeing. Our [students] have most of what they need to be okay... They are ready. We just have to make sure that outside [issues] don't get in the way.

In this example, Ms. Garrity captured a few ideas, which were thematic across interviews: staff's ability to make positive differences; collegiality and teamwork; and teachers viewing students as capable and prepared for learning. Ms. Garrity's comments also illustrate a collective ownership for every student's success, an outcome most frequently attributed to the school's principal, whom College Town High assistant principal Ms. Good describes as "relentless in his beliefs in what kids can do".

Though efficacy levels are high at CTHS, Ms. Pratt, eighth year English teacher, acknowledges that maintaining a highly efficacious faculty is an ongoing task. She reflected on how her and her colleagues' perceptions and understandings of their abilities to influence student outcomes have evolved during her tenure at College Town High School:

> I feel like... and it's changed a lot in the [eight] years I've been here, but I feel each year... there are more and more teachers that have that similar perspective that they believe all of their students can succeed. And I also have the role of department chair, so I have some control over that. I feel there may be a handful

of people, who depending on the day and what has happened maybe with a student or group of students in their classroom, may say that they don't believe they can get through [to students], but for the most part, I don't think they really believe that. I mean... I have probably said it at some time too... maybe out of frustration with a student or a class. I think that overall teachers here do believe that we can make a positive impact on students... not just academically, but also character, the kinds of people they will become. I would say... about 80% feel the same way, and we have lots of conversations to sway the 20% who might not believe that all the time.

Because efficacy is represented by teacher beliefs that may or may not be consistently influenced by students' academic or social behavior, identifying relationship patterns that reflected efficacy within the context of the classroom during observations proved challenging. Though not as plentiful as teacher-student interactions and behaviors that exhibit academic emphasis or faculty trust in students, there were numerous instances where teachers clearly communicated their beliefs in students' preparedness for learning and students' abilities to achieve. Naturally, such teacher affirmation of students fostered favorable student responses (e.g., attentiveness, responsiveness, and active participation) and contributed to a classroom climate seemingly optimal for learning. Additionally, each of the four teachers observed at CTHS exhibited a comfortable grasp on content as well as a valuable knowledge of their students.

### *Academic Emphasis at College Town High*

Surveyed faculty at College Town High held a much lower perception of the school's level of academic emphasis demonstrated by a sub score of 483.85, below the

standardized mean and inconsistently low compared to the school's sub scores for collective teacher efficacy (622.12) and faculty trust (620). Though a smaller sample of respondents than those who participated with the Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools at CTHS, six faculty members interviewed yielded 51 examples of academic emphasis at the school (See Appendix B).

Mr. Downs has taught Geometry and statistics for eight years, the last six of which he has spent at CTHS. He spoke about College Town High School's sense of purpose, its obligation to extend rigorous learning opportunities to prepare students for their futures, whatever those futures might be. Considering the operational or behavioral functioning of schools from my study's conceptual framework, Mr. Downs' comments reflect high expectations, behavioral and academic, of students while also recognizing the critical role of faculty to support students to reaching expectations:

> In math, my role to prepare [students] for the next level. Whatever they do... whether it's a job, the workforce...Whether it's the Army. Whether it's for more education. I think we want [students] to be prepared, especially for the 21st century, with technology skills and thinking skills. For our students who take AP... these are college-leveled classes. [Teachers] know what to expect at that level because we've been there, so I try to run [my AP courses] like a professor might. But I don't forget that the students are still in high school. I want [students] to value learning math. I want them to do their best. The same is true for the [students], who don't plan to go to college and may be taking Geometry during the senior year. It's different with these classes... I'm not treating them like college courses, but I am working hard, and making them work hard as well.

In all, I have two overarching rules in my classes: respect and effort. Respect is not just for me and [other students], but respect for time; respect for learning. Full effort is required all period, every period.

Mr. Downs' AP Statistics course, like many Advanced Placement courses, is taught at a level of high rigor with increased student responsibilities such as time to complete course related assignments outside of school, amount course reading, etc. As an example of academic press at College Town High, any student may enroll in an Advanced Placement course and take full advantage of a college-like learning experience. Ms. Garrity placed the practice into a more clear and meaningful context:

Ms. Garrity: We started [open enrollment] in AP Courses here about six years ago, and let me tell you, the first year... maybe two years were tough.

I: Why were those years so tough? Was it the students? Teachers?

Ms. Garrity: It was everyone! There had always been a certain idea about who belonged in the upper courses. Then suddenly anyone who wanted to take an AP course could.

I: Any AP course?

Ms. Garrity: Well not any course. Many of the math and science offerings have pre-requisites or co-requisites. Students just can't decide to take AP Calculus or Chemistry without having at least taken Algebra II. But any student who wants to can take [Advanced Placement] courses in English, social studies, art history, and even two of the sciences: biology and environmental regardless of their previous grades.

I: And how is that received by students? Do you find that many do enroll in the

higher end course offerings?

Ms. Garrity: Today, yes. But remember we are over six years in. We had to work out some concerns, some ways that people thought. We had to convince teachers who did not originally believe that any [student] could belong and do well in an AP class. We had to convince the parents of students who had already been in AP classes that the courses would not be dumbed down. But the toughest convincing we had to do was for students who had never taken even an honors course to now try an AP class.

Embracing open enrollment and students' success, the faculty at College Town High School has put in several layers of academic intervention and support including: after school remediation and corrective teaching opportunities (with transportation); tutoring partnerships with the local state university, Advanced Placement labs for students needing extra help with AP coursework; and awards and incentives for all students who exhibit commendable achievement. Ms. Good spoke about the importance of academic interventions to students' achievement at all levels:

> We were getting students into honors and advanced leveled courses. Our numbers went up big time... But what we didn't get on the front end were results. Suddenly, the talk changed from getting [students] in to getting [students] in and then making sure that they have a fighting chance once they got there. The things we put in place ended up being helpful to all students, even if [students] never take an advanced class. We began to run buses to get kids home after tutoring two evenings a week; we built up our AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) program; we got college students in our building to help our

students. And I can't tell you how powerful the AP labs have been. All first-time takers of an advanced class are assigned to a lab, and the lab is supervised by a teacher, but mainly run by other students who are more experienced with AP.

Data gathered from note taking during observations show consistency between interviewed faculty's perceptions of academic emphasis and instructional practices and classroom interactions that foster such emphasis. Many of the behaviors and examples (e.g., high expectations, engagement, participation, critical thinking) conveyed during staff interviews were highly evident within the general context of the four observed classrooms. Four of the six participants at College Town High cited value to preserve class time as a contributor to the school's level of academic emphasis, and I observed extremely little inefficiency during instructional time. Rather, I discovered learning objectives that were measurable and clearly posted and teachers and students working collaboratively to reach objectives. As important, each participant cited student interventions (i.e., Saturday sessions and peer tutoring) and open access to advanced courses as critical elements to advancing academic emphasis at the school. These values were again conveyed during my conversation with Ms. Lee, a seven-year chemistry teacher who is in her second year at CTHS.

I: How would you describe students' willingness to take advantage of some of the enrichment opportunities... the chances to come in on Saturday, the peer tutoring opportunities?

Ms. Lee: [Students'] willingness to participate in peer tutoring is totally voluntary. We don't mandate it, but students make their own arrangements for tutoring. [Students] decide where they will meet, and when they will be there.

We do have a list of students who volunteer to [tutor], but those needing [tutoring] have to be willing to take advantage.

I: So, what do you think these types of things communicate to students about what the school expects of them?

Ms. Lee: Well our [students] know that we want them to earn high grades. I mean not just high grades for grades sake, but grades that show that they have learned material. Extra support lets [students] know that [teachers] won't stop at failure.

Though some participants spoke of students' desires to earn good grades and the competition to be atop the class, College Town's recently implemented (2012-2013 academic year) decision to eliminate class rank was communicated by all six participants as valuable to restoring students' emphasis on mastering content rather than simply earning high marks.

*Faculty Trust in Students and Parents at College Town High*

Faculty at College Town High, as well as at the other two studied schools, often communicated an understanding of trust within the context of community (See Appendix C). Ms. Pratt, who as previously mentioned has taught English at CTHS for six of her eight years in the profession, discussed how students and teachers work as partners to establish a sense of community, trust, and respect within the classroom. Ms. Pratt continues her thoughts on community and trust to include effective relationships with families:

Right now... So, my sixth year [at College Town High] [trust] is as strong as it's been. And I would say that students trust the community of the classroom, the community that the teachers and students have built. That community has roles,

> roles for teachers, roles for students. At the beginning of the year, [community] means playing out a lot of scenarios so that students can get a sense of the roles... how everything will happen. So, it's understanding routine. It's understanding reward. It's understanding motivation. And we are testing those scenarios. Students are testing teachers. Teachers are testing students. And by Thanksgiving the unknowns are not as much a part of the community, and everyone's expectations are laid out. It's really taking care of each other and valuing why we are here together. Students have roles. I have roles... Moms, dads... grandparents have roles. And we all know [our roles]. We keep all of our activities focused students learning [content], learning skills. That's what we all want.

Participants shared that students, teachers, and parents at College Town High work to assume the best of each other, and these perceptions are evidenced by the school's SAOS sub score of 620 for faculty trust reflecting a more optimistic view of trust at CTHS than at 90% of schools in the norming sample. The general sense of community and belonging, student collaboration and engagement, and students' personal and collective accountability were evident during observations. Roles and established routines existed as students appeared to know expectations as well as the behaviors, academic and social, required to fulfill expectations. For example, I spent over 17 minutes in a classroom before the teacher gave any direction to the class. However, in the meantime, students had arranged themselves into what I assumed were preexisting groups, held on-task conversations at appropriate volumes, and when the time came, smartly contributed to the general classroom conversation. It was evident that this type

activity had become routine, and students fulfilled their roles and met expectations. Mr. Downs attributes such classroom interaction and establishment of class routines to consistency:

> I know that my expectations for [my] students are what my colleagues expect as well. So... it's not like they can leave [Mrs. Shultz's] class where the environment is serious and focused and come to my class where we joke and play for the block. [Teachers] have common classroom expectations, and of course there are more... more generic school expectations that everybody knows of. But teacher-to-teacher, we make sure students know that they will have to work hard here, in every class. As far as behavior goes, students know that if... let's say listening to music isn't allowed downstairs in their history classes, then it's not allowed in my math class or in anyone else's.

## Historic Battle High School

### *Collective Teacher Efficacy at HBHS*

While Historic Battle High School's overall academic optimism score of 568.09 falls within the high average range for typical schools, it is the lowest overall score of the three schools studied. Consistently, Historic Battle's moderate sub score of 561.82 falls below this study's sample mean of 607.58 for collective teacher efficacy. Interestingly, data gathered through interviews, observations, and a review of school documents suggest a solidly efficacious faculty that believes in students' readiness to learn and exhibits confidence in their abilities, individual and collective, to support student learning. Appendix D exhibits coded data reflecting collective teacher efficacy at Historic Battle High School. As discussed in Chapter Three, the distribution of the

Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools at Historic Battle High was inconsistent from the distribution of the tool at the other two sites. The unique method of survey distribution and collection may account for the inconsistency between academic optimism scores and other data from Historic Battle High.

| Participant Pseudonym | Assignment |
|---|---|
| [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Santos | Chemistry |
| [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Canty | Government |
| [redacted] | [redacted] |
| Ms. Austin | Assistant Principal |

**Table 4.2** Interview participants at Historic Battle High School

Ms. Laverty, a 20-year school counselor with nine years at Historic Battle High School acknowledges belief in students as individuals, belief in professional abilities to reach students, and supportive relationships as acute elements to students' success, regardless of prior school achievement:

> As counselors are concerned, we see that there is good in every student. [Students] can all accomplish. They just need the right resources, the right tools, the right people supporting them. We know it is important to encourage [students], to help them learn the tools that they need to be successful. Our high performers, students who are at the middle of the road, and those [students] who struggle or underachieve, are all valuable here. [Students] know that [achievement is important] here... [Students] know the value of getting good grades at [Historic Battle] High School. I think that generally speaking the teachers here feel like I do. Some are more set in their ways, but [students] know almost right from the start [which faculty members are] going to be supportive of them, who wants them to do well.

Ms. Laverty's perception of teacher efficacy at Historic Battle High School is shared by her colleagues, who provided similar examples of the school's practices to reach all students further contrasting HBHS's pedestrian Survey of Academic Optimism scores. Ms. Santos, who has spent her entire 23-year career as a science teacher at Historic Battle, discussed how the practice of teaching has changed during her time in the field:

> In the large scheme, the teachers here believe that [their work matters]. Our teachers care about students. They want them to succeed... When I began teaching, for the most part, [teachers] stood in front of the [chalk] board and lectured, and that's not how it's done now. Now we are in the days of more professional development, more documentation of what [teachers] are doing in the classroom, more standardized testing...more teacher evaluation. And some of the people in the profession don't like that. [Teachers] want to get into their classrooms, shut the door and focus on their students. Sometimes [colleagues] see the job as being more business, pushing paper. And that's a shame because it has to be both. We have the freedom to try things in the classroom, to teach as we would like to. But there are also standards and expectations for students to meet those standards.

Working toward continuous school improvement, having meaningful and relevant professional development, and supporting teachers to try new instructional ideas were recurring themes at HBHS. Ms. Canty, a social studies teacher, reiterated her understanding and perceptions of teachers' beliefs in their collective abilities to reach all students as she commented:

> For most of the time [20 years] I've been at [Historic Battle], [teachers] have believed students can perform. I was around a long time before the [Virginia Standards of Learning], and [teachers] believed in what they were doing then. We have had a few principals, and they have been very different kinds of leaders, but they all supported [teachers'] beliefs that what we do is important and that we could impact students.

Faculty at Historic Battle High also expressed an overwhelming value for principal-led opportunities that build teamwork, collegiality, and collaboration. Such values are supported in the research literature by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) who propose that schools at which teachers are encouraged and supported to collectively explore solutions to learning, motivation, and behavior challenges are likely to improve teachers' feelings of efficacy. Moreover, teachers benefit through sharing ideas, strategies, methods, and samples of student products as these practices allow them to collaboratively determine what works in improving student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Extending effective principal leadership to include positive morale and teambuilding, Ms. Tatum, an English teacher shared:

> A big part of what [the principal] does is meant to help us get better at working together. We have school improvement and development activities that group us on teams that we might not usually choose... For example, in a lot of places teachers are grouped by department. They sit by department in meetings and things like that. [The principal] takes us out of that comfort zone. [Teachers] get the chance to really know each other, and support and moral are automatically improved. As part of school improvement, I might have to do a book study or

action research project with folks from science or career education. For a few years, we even taught on grade level teams where a group of us across departments shared all of the same students. We were scheduled for the same planning periods, and that gave us a chance to talk about our [students] and coordinate our lessons. We feel a part of a team because we really are.

*Academic Emphasis at Historic Battle High School*

Lee and Bryk (1989) revealed a directly positive correlation between a school's emphasis of academics and its students' achievement and found that schools with more orderly and disciplined environments experienced less achievement distribution among students. Hoy and his colleagues (1991) replicated Lee and Bryk's study with similar results indicating academic emphasis as a collective property positively and directly related to student achievement in high schools.

Similar to collective teacher efficacy, the HBHS faculty indicated high average perceptions of the school's level of academic emphasis indicated by a sub score of 586.4. Distinguishing examples of academic emphasis at Historic Battle High are represented in Appendix E.

Ms. Austin, an assistant principal at HBHS, spoke about how students' success has been traditionally defined by final grades rather than actual acquired knowledge:

The standard way that [academic success] is defined for our students is the grade that they get, and that's something that I would like to see change. I think that students need to understand that academic success can still occur even if [students don't earn straight A's]. As we are looking at all students, we have to help them understand where the value is in actual learning because [learning] is really a life

skill. We want students to know the value of learning, to emphasize what it is they know and how they will use [knowledge]. American Education has always placed the emphasis on the grades, and with the competitive nature of getting to the next step...trade school, college, or a job, [students] should care about the final grade, but not above what they actually learned.

Ms. Austin's statements constitute more than criticism and commentary on misplaced educational values. Instead, she calls on students abilities at all levels to apply what they have learned as more important than the grades they receive. Ms. Austin's perspective suggests that over time a student's ability to effectively and correctively apply what he has been taught is a far greater measure of actual teaching and learning than the grades on his transcript. Straight A's in school are not necessarily a predictor of successful learning.

The emphasis on knowledge over grades at Historic Battle High is not made only by the school's administration. Mr. Reed, Algebra II teacher, discussed how an apparent misalignment between teachers' and students' views over the importance of the learning experience presents classroom challenges:

Every semester I ask my new students what they expect, what they hope to get out of our time in algebra. Almost always the answer is that [students] expect to get a good grade... [Students] don't say that they want to learn how to solve linear equations so that they can earn a good grade, but only that they want the grade. This is problem when I am trying to teach the importance of skills. [Students] can be more interested in knowing what the answer is so that they can get a problem

right, but not as interested in the [computational] skills they need to procedurally solve the equation.

While students' declarations of the grades they hope to earn are as much achievement goals as the more uncommon admissions of exactly what it is they wish to learn, HBHS faculty suggested the need to have students to become more intrinsically motivated, as Mr. Reed exclaimed, "...to want to learn for the sake of learning". Ms. Canty discussed how she supports students to value acquired knowledge over final grades:

> My students know that I'm not in the business of teaching for memory. We talk about the difference between remembering material and really learning it and we do [activities] in class that promote actual learning. I don't emphasize historical facts... we emphasize the thinking. [Students] don't just get the Bill of Rights, they get to make judgments about how [the Bill of Rights] came to be. They get the chance evaluate the relevance of each [Bill] and to modify [the Bill of Rights] to reflect the values of our modern society. It's not just the freedom of speech or the right to bear arms. When students can think in [these] ways, they'll pass tests and get the grades but they also learn the material.

Classroom interactions at Historic Battle High's closely illustrated what Ms. Canty described. Teachers and students shared a relationship seemingly centered on mutual respect and academic purpose. For example, students in a first-year French class, mainly ninth graders, were expected to conduct half of the group's communications in French even during the first semester when language acquisition is still relatively new. When English prevailed as the dominant language during class, the teacher immediately

reestablished the expectation that ideas are conveyed using French. Knowing that they would be held to this expectation, students preemptively flipped through texts and sought clues from each other to ensure that, when the time came, they could speak their thoughts in the language. This example not only supports Historic Battle High's faculty perceptions of high expectations but also contextually reinforces knowledge application and demonstrates the teacher's belief that students are capable of high levels of performance. Similarly, during another observation, an English teacher challenged her students to not only identify figurative language in text but also to theorize why such language was used exemplifying value for students' critical thinking and synthesis.

*Faculty Trust in Students and Parents at Historic Battle High School*

Early effective schools research presents trust between schools and families by identifying home-school support as primarily pervasive and significant elements of healthy and successful schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). Consistent with its sub scores for efficacy and academic press, Historic Battle's SAOS yield a high average score of 555.9 for faculty trust of students and parents. Historic Battle's participant's examples of faculty trust in students and parents are included in Appendix F.

While communicating her perceptions of trust, Ms. Laverty, school counselor, conveyed a message that was fairly consistent among the 18 interview participants: "relationships matter". Her account below further suggests that the assumption of goodwill is a major component to trust building and influences the environmental, more affective dynamics of schools:

> Again, I'm going to go back to this whole relationship building thing. I think... if you even attempt to build a relationship and you have that, it's like a mutual respect, the trust that we will do what we are supposed to do. [Trust] is just a feeling, which sounds really weird, and I know that. But I can't think of any other way to describe it. It's a mutual feeling of respect and confidence that people will come through. If [a student] tells me something, I believe what they say until I have a reason not to. Sometimes when students tell me about something that has happened they'll say something like, 'If you don't believe me, you can ask [whomever].' I respond that I don't have to ask anyone else. When a [student] gives me information, I believe in that information until I have good reasons not to believe anymore.

Ms. Tatum also acknowledged that positive relationships with students promote more effective instruction but cited relationships with students' families, mainly through frequent communication, as equally critical:

> When parents only hear from me when things are bad...when their kids are failing or misbehaving, that sets the stage for a bad teacher-parent relationship. That's why I believe it's important to reach out before I ever get to know [their child] as [her] teacher. That way, we only talk about the student and the ways we can work together to keep [her] on the right track. If [parents] only hear from me when something is wrong, that sets the tone of the relationship. If I don't share what's good, I can't guarantee that [parents] will be supportive in the event that I do need them in adversity. Plus, I believe teachers lose credibility with parents when the only time [parents] hear from [teachers] is to complain or point out the negative.

[Parents] also need to hear about [their children] doing good, positive things in school.

Faculty described a number of events to which the school invites parents and the larger community to attend. Ms. Laverty discussed some of the occasions designed to promote communication and partnerships with students and parents:

> An interesting thing about this community is that many, many of our students' parents went to school here themselves. So they are pretty much naturally connected. They know our school's history, and they know our school's reputation in the county. That's a huge bonus because most of our parents are always going to give us the benefit of the doubt when they hear things that may not be right. [Parents] know that open house is every Wednesday before Labor Day. They know that our back to school night happens during the third week back and that we have academic awards banquets at the end of the semester and athletic banquets at the end of each sports season. [Parents] know when our scheduled conferences fall, but also they know that they can call here any time and get a meeting or call with [whomever] they need to work with. We have these traditional dates...we really don't even need a calendar.

Ms. Austin discussed faculty presence at non-required school events such as athletics and performing arts as important to bridging trust:

> Our [athletes and other performers] really like to see us at their [activities]. I believe it shows them that they are important to us beyond the classroom or assistant principal's office. Some of the best conversations I have had with our parents have happened at a football game or a concert or other school event.

> There have been times when I might not have been able to reach a parent by phone, but can grab them at a game just to say hey Johnny has three tardy slips this week or Susie really is making progress with her attitude. I don't think parents are offended when [school personnel] approach them to talk about their kids. A lot of them are so glad we did.

Ms. Santos, a chemistry teacher at HBHS, spoke about supporting students to participate in activities as a means to improve their connection with school:

> Because I teach chemistry, I am always trying to get students to join the chemistry club or CHROME because I know that [participation] will give them the chance to see me in a little bit of a different way, and it will give us the chance to talk about science and other things [students] are interested in outside of the class setting. I feel the same way about other [school] activities, clubs, and athletic teams. These things give students a chance to be a bigger part of the school community. [Activities] also give [teachers] a chance to connect with students by supporting their extracurricular involvement.

**Suburban County High School**

With a total academic optimism score of 618.55, faculty at Suburban County High perceive their school as highly optimistic and hold the most positive overall perceptions of collective teacher efficacy, faculty trust in students and parents, and academic emphasis of the three studied schools (See Appendix G). SCHS faculty indicated higher levels of optimistic school than nearly 90% of in the norming sample. Accordingly, sub scores for Suburban County High well exceed this study's sample means for each property of academic optimism: collective teacher efficacy 638.79 (sample mean=

607.58), faculty trust in students and parents 622.56 (mean 599.49), and academic emphasis 594.31 (mean= 554.9).

| Participant Pseudonym | Assignment |
|---|---|
| [redacted] | |
| Ms. Tilden | English 11 |
| [redacted] | |
| Ms. McCrary | Biology |
| [redacted] | |
| Ms. Jacobs | School Counselor |

**Table 4.3** Interview participants at Suburban County High School

*Collective Teacher Efficacy at Suburban County High School*

Mr. Brahm, ninth year mathematics teacher, attributes much of the faculty's confidence and optimistic perceptions to the principal. He discussed the importance of effective school leadership to developing and sustaining a culture of academic optimism in high schools:

> [Suburban County High School] has good leadership, basically talking about the principal. [The principal] has been here for two years, and I know that's a short time, but the principal before her was excellent as well. So our school has had really good leadership, and I think that sets the tone. The teachers trust [the principal], and she trusts [teachers]. It's just a very professional, trusting atmosphere here. I know personally I feel I've got a lot of flexibility to do what I think is right. And I have [the principal's] support to try new things and maybe even fail if it comes to that. That matters a lot... I know personally that [principal's support] means the world to me.

Faculty conveyed their interpretations of academic optimism through themes that reflect student focus, teacher collegiality, meaningful staff development, and continuous

school improvement as examples Suburban County High School's environmental, operational, and personal functioning influenced by school leadership.

Ms. Tilden, an English teacher, cited the principal's emphasis on open student access to International Baccalaureate courses as a display of teachers' beliefs in their abilities to reach all students:

> This year our division has had each teacher set goals, and my goals center on students who struggle in my [International Baccalaureate] classes. Many of my students have never taken an IB class before, and so that's a different experience. Any [student] at our school [may] take an IB course... I think that's different from some schools where students may have to have prerequisites or certain grades. Here anyone can take the courses, which is good but challenging. Most of [our teachers] welcome the challenge to get students to learn in tougher courses. My belief is that we can get them all to do well. That [belief] was born within me...It's unfair [to students] to have a teacher who doesn't believe that.

All six of the interview participants provided examples to illustrate how the principal works to maintain morale and a positive and focused learning environment. Specific examples supporting this theme ranged from the principal's high visibility to faculty recognition to regularly communicating academic and behavioral expectations of students. Mr. Henry, assistant principal, commented:

> Staff knows it begins and ends with their efforts to reach all of our [students]. It's not only about the [students] who do all of the right things, those who are always prepared, those who have their homework every time, or those whose parents are always here at school. We have students who sometimes fall astray, and [those

students] are as important at [Suburban County High] as any others. Teachers, administrators, custodians... everyone here really believes in [students] and the top cheerleader is [the principal].

Conversely, concerns with class sizes were mildly thematic at SCHS. While remarks were not conveyed in the context that class size adversely impacts the general sense of efficacy at the school, one of the conversations effectively captured the sense of difficulty with supporting all students who need additional time beyond the classroom when class sizes are larger.

I: How do you personally ensure that challenging students will be successful?

Ms. McCrary: Challenging as in behavior?

I: Okay... behaviorally challenging students, but also those who may be well-intentioned but lack motivation, those with academic challenges.

Ms. McCrary: I try to get them to come see me, you know, personally. Anytime [a teacher] can have more personal interaction with [her students], they're just... they're just going to do better. [Teachers] get to know them better. That's not new information, but I've noticed from when I started teaching 13 years ago, and I had smaller classes, I felt like I had better relationships with students. I could do much more to offer [extra] help than I can with almost 30 [students] in a class.

Mr. Brahm, who teaches advanced mathematic courses with enrollments of 18-24 students and "academic" or grade level courses with enrollments of 24-27 students per class, commented:

You know... We have over 1600 students at this school, and sometimes classes are larger than some might think is ideal. But I have never had a class with 30

students; I do have 27 in an academic course, but that's no problem. I know what [students] need from me. [Students] know what I need from them. We make it work, and everyone who needs help gets it...sometimes from their classmates. We just... We make it go.

Suburban County's efficacy sub scores from the Survey of Academic Optimism of Schools and data gathered from staff interviews were further grounded through observations of teachers and their students in the instructional setting where it was highly evident that teacher's view students as prepared for learning. Students demonstrated higher-order thinking in a sociology class where they were tasked to share their opinions or reactions to social images provided by the teacher (i.e., the Capitol building under the stress of bills and coins, same gender unions). As an added level of thinking, students were then grouped by four and asked to brainstorm social issues that may have been pertinent a generation or two ago and contrast them with contemporary issues. Ultimately, each group shared thinking on the challenges of the past, how those challenges were resolved, and how similar problem solving methods might be used to address modern social concerns. There was a classroom standard of in-depth, thought provoking dialogue supporting teacher perceptions of Suburban County's students as self-directed, complex thinkers who value classroom experiences.

*Academic Emphasis at Suburban County High School*

Though not perceived as optimistically as collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis at Suburban County High was sub scored at 594.31, reflecting favorable faculty attitudes. Mr. Henry, an assistant principal, discussed the importance of holding high

academic expectations for all students and the significance of recognizing students who meet expectations as variables to postsecondary academic readiness:

> Teachers have a consciousness to ensure that our students are ready for higher education] when they graduate. A 3.0 [grade point average] is a minimal expectation for every student here. When we talk with kids about their grades, we talk about 3.5. And we celebrate students who meet those targets at the end of [each] semester. Therefore... our students know about grades and grade point averages and why these things are important as we get them ready for higher [education] opportunities. We also recognize those students who may not have a 3.0 or a 3.5 [GPA] but they have worked hard to improve their overall average. That shows our support for students who know they need to and can do better academically, but don't have a competitive grade average, so to speak. Grades matter to students, and most [students] are really competitive to get the best grades.

Suburban County High's examples of academic emphasis are illustrated in Appendix H as faculty conveyed that students generally value academic success, and that their highest academically performing students are among the most well rounded. One of the best examples of academic emphasis gained throughout the study came from Ms. Jacobs, a school counselor who spoke about the various social roles played by academically successful students at SCHS:

> I: How are the "super-competitive" students you mentioned viewed by their peers at this school?

Ms. Jacobs: [At Suburban County High students] are celebrated for [their] academics. It's common that we have the top ten ranked students in a class who are also skilled athletes, or play in the band, or are some of our most talented arts students. These are the same [students] who are in clubs and leadership and on the Homecoming court... The cool kids [at Suburban County High School] are not just the jocks. Our [students] see being cool as being involved... being rounded and connected with their school.

Mr. Charles, history teacher who also attended the county's schools discussed the sentiment as one of academic pride:

All of our [division's] schools do really great things, especially the high schools. It's been that way for a long time, even when I was a student at [local high school]. [Suburban County High students] want this school to be seen as the best. There is some honor in that. If our SOL scores come back higher than [another local school's] we announce it. When our average SAT scores are higher, we make sure it's known. When we have more National Merit Scholars, we throw a party... It's probably a little bit of bragging, but book rivalries are just as deep as basketball or football rivalries in this county. Always have been.

During my conversations with the school counselor and assistant principal, I asked about the county "book rivalries" that Mr. Charles mentioned. The assistant principal confirmed that the competition advances academic emphasis at Suburban County High School:

My children both graduated from [another county high school]. They both were good students, and my daughter was a really good volleyball and softball player.

> [Their school] felt the same as we do at Suburban County High. Just like [we do] they wanted to have the higher number of students going to colleges. They wanted to have more competitive classes. I think it's great... take the competition out of it, and you'd still have three good high schools pushing kids to their fullest. I know it would be that way at [Suburban County High School].

Though she spent much of her career outside of the division and never had children who attended the local schools, Ms. Jacobs described her interactions with her colleagues from the other high schools:

> We all have what I would say are really, really high expectations, and students count on [faculty] to expect great things of them. But I can feel a difference when I interact with counselors from the other schools during data season... especially as the College Board (SAT) numbers come out. It's edgy. Edgy, but healthy edgy... it's not bitter at all. It's just healthy motivation to make sure that our students get the best we can offer them.

*Faculty Trust in Students and Parents at Suburban County High School*

Most of the study's participants, those at Suburban County High as well as those at the other two schools, conceptualized their understandings and perceptions of trust through the context of school as a community (See Appendix I). For example, Ms. Tilden, extends the notion of community by illustrating the family environment that exists at SCHS describing how the school has endured tragedy as a real family community builder. Ms. Tilden also ascribes trust between school and home to effective and communication:

We've had some personal tragedies here that have really allowed us to show how much we can really come together and how much we care about each other. Over the last year, we have lost students to tragedy. These incidents made us lean on each other and build family-like relationships. We see ourselves as more than teachers and students or adults and kids. We are like a family that understands what it means to do our parts and take care of each other. [Teachers] understand our roles and commitment to kids, and [students] take on what they have to do to be successful. As far as our parents go... I did something new this year that, at the time, I was a little concerned about because it took a lot of my time. But I gave my [students'] parents homework. At the beginning of the year, I asked them to write [me] a letter about their child, so that I could get to know [the student] a little bit more. I also asked [parents] to tell me exactly what they expected their child's experience in English 11 to be like. I had close to 80% of my [students'] parents return the homework... mainly through emails. I returned every letter.

Ms. McCrary also discussed parents' access to the school's online grade book as a positive communication factor:

Our parents don't need a report card or interim report to know exactly how [their children] are doing in classes. Almost all of my students' parents look at grades online. [Our principal] expects that we update grade books at least twice a week, and parents can check on their kids by looking at [their] grades for every assignment. It's totally transparent, and if [parents] have concerns, they can message [teachers] right from the grade book. Parents have to be available for a teacher-parent conference...with the online grade book, [parents] can look at their

[children's] progress anytime [parents] would like. Students also have their own logins as well and can stay on top of things on their own. [Online grade books] have really increased communication between teachers, students, and home.

Mr. Brahm also spoke positively about the overall effectiveness of the online grade book as a communicative vehicle. Nonetheless, he also discussed some of the challenges such access has created, and how he further used communication to solve concerns and maintain trust with his students and their families:

> Sometimes (extended pause)... I just can't, or I find it difficult to get [assignments] graded and entered as quickly as [students and parents] would like me to. I let my students know that if we take a test at second block on, it's not realistic to expect that I have graded and posted by fourth block. So, they understand that it takes a little bit of time. Parents can be the same way. I have gotten messages to ask when assignments would be put in, and sometimes the assignments aren't even due yet. Since I teach math, and most of my grading is easier than maybe like reading essays or grading projects, I had to ask students and parents for 48 hours to get grades in. If two days go by and grades aren't [online], then they have every right to be mad or to ask what's going on. Since, I asked for that, [students, parents, and I] have not had any issues, and the online grade books have worked.

The assistant principal noted that though a popular method of open communication at Suburban County High, the school has not separated from more traditional ways of engaging students' families. Mr. Henry spoke about maintaining trust

through other communicative methods such as newsletters, the marquee, and occasional automated phone calls:

The electronic communication has been great, and a good majority of our students and parents use it. But we also know that people in the community who do not have students at [Suburban County High School] also need information about what happens here. Every quarter we generate a newsletter, about four pages, that highlights student achievement, school athletics, upcoming events, a faculty feature, and things like that. We print up... I guess a few hundred and send them to community organizations like the Lion's Club and the NAACP. We send a copy to several area churches. And parents who either don't have or use the internet can request that we mail a pare copy to [their homes]. It seems like an antiquated way to get the word out, but you miss people who might be really interested if you don't do things like this. It does build trust, and it shows transparency, which is important in [our] community.

Communication along with the other core values of Suburban County High are erected in classrooms and hallways throughout the school and effectively capture the essence of data gathered through interviews and direct observations. Core values at Suburban County High School include: the pursuit of excellence, partnerships, pride, positive climate, service to others, and accountability. The school's core values also include specific commitments promoting trust among students, faculty and staff, and parents and other citizens.

- For our students, we will provide a quality, personalized instructional program and safe environment that celebrates individuality. We will encourage self-directed, lifelong learning in a pleasant, caring, safe environment that nurtures

positive self-esteem and responsibility. In addition, we value the recognition and celebration of accomplishments: academic, athletic, and personal.

- For our faculty and staff, we will provide opportunities to actively participate in the decision making process. We recognize the importance of mutual respect and teamwork to produce a supportive atmosphere of kinship. In addition, we value the recognition and celebration of accomplishments: academic and personal.
- For the parents and other citizens, we will establish a climate where school and community are aware of and responsive to each other's needs and services. We can best accomplish our mission to ensure student success by setting high academic standards and providing equality of opportunities, marked by mutual trust, respect, fairness, acceptance and personalization among students, parents, faculty, staff, and the community.

*Findings of Participant Observations*

As described in Chapter Three, students and teachers from four classrooms were observed at each of the three schools. This study's methodology included observations in the classroom context as a means to validate the data gathered from faculty through the pilot survey and direct interviews. Observations of collective teacher efficacy are described in the following Table 4.4. I found that teacher efficacy, more specifically collective efficacy, is extremely difficult to determine in the classroom setting. Earlier in this chapter I identified teacher behaviors or cues that I interpreted to communicate faculty beliefs in their abilities to effectively reach their students. Admittedly, such connections for collective teacher efficacy were made loosely with the most evident behaviors being that the teacher communicated high expectations for student performance

and extended affirmation for favorable student behaviors (i.e., attentiveness, responsiveness, and active participation).

| Teaching Behavior | Student Behavior (Response) | Core Coding Category |
|---|---|---|
| Communicated expectations that students continue work on existing projects | Active participation, engaged in goal setting, problem solving | Motivating students academically and socially. Engaging students in the learning process |
| Extended affirmation to students | Engaged in reading and writing, collaborative (group) work, summarization | Maintaining a positive school environment, Motivating students academically and socially |
| Relied on students prior knowledge, connected prior learning to new material | Attentive, responsive, collaborative, connect n making | Motivating students academically and socially, Engaging students in the learning process |
| Collaborative teacher (Spec. Ed.) team actively teaches core content | Attentive, hands-on activity, responsive, writing | Extending opportunities or enrichment and extra help |
| Unit Goals charted by class and brightly posted | NA | Motivating students academically and socially, Engaging students in the learning process |

**Table 4.4** Observations of teacher efficacy (classroom context)

While most of the observed interactions of teachers and students worked to validate other data, there were instances in which interactions were seemingly contradictory to accounts gathered from school personnel. For example, in one of the schools four out of six participants indicated the schools' efforts to preserve instructional time. However, I had the benefit of observing the start of a class in which students entered the classroom, collected their journals from a bin on a back table, and sat aimlessly for seven minutes as the teacher took attendance and worked, with the assistance of another staff member, to get an LCD projector to display properly. Though it was evident that there were expectations and routines to get class started, students convened with little direction resulting in an unintended loss of instructional time, which had been so greatly emphasized as valuable by interview participants. At another school, faculty conveyed an understanding of students' self-advocacy as a contributor to trust.

Yet I observed only a few instances in which students were encouraged to lead class discussion or share and justify differing points of view. Conversely, there was an abundance of practices that promote student voice at the other two schools, one of which did not include students' self advocacy as a major theme for academic emphasis or trust. It is important to note that these inconsistencies do not necessarily invalidate the interview data. Rather, they extended me the opportunity to seek deeper, more generalizable understandings of academic optimism and the organizational practices that foster it. Generally, there was much consistency between participants' accounts of academic optimism and actual observed classroom practices. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 summarize some of the most frequently observed classroom interactions that exhibit academic emphasis and faculty trust in students.

| Teacher Behavior | Student Behavior (Response) | Initial Teacher Codes<br>**Core Coding Category** |
|---|---|---|
| Teachers extended students opportunities to make predictions, inferences and justify positions | Collaborative (group) work, responsive, engaged, evaluation of variables | academic expectations, academic rigor, college readiness, critical thinking<br>**Engaging students in the learning process, Promoting inviting, connected schools** |
| Students knew the expectations for group work, assigning roles, and keeping conversations on task. | Attentive, responsive, collaborative, assisting each other, engaged in meaningful work, engaged discussion | collaboration, citizenship, participation, engagement, coexistence, orderly environment<br>**Engaging students in the learning process** |
| Teachers' availability (Two week calendar) before after school posted | NA | remediation, teachers available after school hours, before school hours<br>**Extending opportunities or enrichment and extra help** |
| Teacher serves to facilitate student-led discussion | Attentive, responsive, collaborative, making connections, inferences | codes, citizenship, coexistence, participation, engagement<br>**Engaging students in the learning process, Promoting inviting, connected schools** |
| Teacher led students to make connections between content areas (ex. algebraic calculations in Earth Science, historical contexts in marketing) | Attentive, hands-on activity, responsive, writing, helping each other, building on prior knowledge, making connections across content | interdisciplinary lesson designs, curriculum maps, academic rigor, critical thinking<br>**Engaging students in the learning process** |
| Teacher maintained time on task by setting parameters to keep students focused | Attentive, hands-on activity, responsive, collaborative, writing, benchmark setting, planning | respect for school values, preserving class time, academic expectations, collaboration<br>**Motivating students academically and socially, Engaging students in the learning process** |
| Connections made between academic tasks and later life benefits (college, work, problem solving) | Responsive, attentive, hands-on activity, writing, analysis and evaluation, small discussion groups, engagement in meaningful activity | emphasis on college and career readiness, application of knowledge, work related skills, communication, making connections, real-world experiences<br>**Engaging students in the learning process** |
| Managing an orderly environment | On task, participatory, performing class routines, transitioning, working as assigned, engagement | responsibilities, following rules and regulations, being prepared, relationships, procedures, choice, appropriate behavior, arriving on time, demonstrating kindness, community atmosphere<br>**Creating a positive school environment** |

**Table 4.5** Observations of academic emphasis (classroom context)

| Teacher Behavior | Student Behavior | Initial Teacher Codes<br>**Core Coding Category** |
|---|---|---|
| Protection from adverse consequences during class discussions (no penalty for sharing an incorrect response).<br><br>Example teacher response, "Not exactly, but tell me how you have come to that conclusion." | Active participation, continuous pursuit of the answer, responsive, justifying assumptions | self-advocacy, support, trust, respect, common ground, students' opinions valued, offer feedback, commitment to students<br>**Creating a positive school environment, Engaging students in the learning process, Promoting inviting, connected schools** |
| Teacher greets each student at the door before the bell and issues an "entry ticket" with a task pertaining to the lesson. Teacher formally greets students by Mr. and Ms. (Modeling respect, value for relationships) | Reciprocate respect (responsive), cooperative, engaged | value for each other, tone setting, respect, cooperation, roles, involvement, quality interactions, self-directed students<br>**Creating a positive school environment, Engaging students in the learning process, Promoting inviting, connected schools** |
| Reasonable negotiation for time keeping students on task and allowing flexibility (i.e., "So how long will you need to pull this together?, "Let's take about ten minutes, see where we are, and then go from there.") | Attentive, purposeful work, engaged, on task, participatory, performing class routines, transitioning | cooperation, roles, involvement, decision making, planning, responsibilities, self-directed students, students as decision makers, leadership, classroom democracies, students' opinions valued<br>**Engaging students in the learning process, Promoting inviting, connected schools** |

**Table 4.6** Observations of faculty trust (classroom context)

*Findings of Document Analyses*

As previously noted in Chapter Three there are numerous school documents (e.g., school mission statement, improvement plans, course enrollment worksheets) that are significant in interpreting the level of academic optimism as they reflect an organization's expectations and beliefs in reaching students (efficacy), efforts toward continuous academic improvement, and emphasis on communication, which is a trust builder. For the purposes of this study, it was important to extend the critical information gathered from documents or records and interpret how that information is used reflect a school's

level of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and/or faculty trust in students and parents.

*Mission/Vision Statements.* College Town High School employs only a vision statement, which was analyzed for elements of academic optimism. Both Historic Battle High and Suburban County High schools have more traditional mission statements, which promote the respective school's purpose and commitment to its students. Particular to each vision or mission statement is a clear and defined assertion to extend learning experiences that reflect a value for individuality and students reaching their fullest academic and social potential (See Appendix J).

College Town's vision statement "calls for educational strategies, interventions, and programs that address the diverse needs of its student population" reinforcing the school's emphasis on individual intervention, remediation and corrective teaching, and collaboration in planning, which were all mentioned by faculty during interviews. In addition to academic purpose, vision statements from Historic Battle and Suburban County High Schools extend to include a pledge for character development, responsibility, personal accountability and leadership reflecting faculty perceptions of collaboration, citizenship, student engagement, coexistence, and an orderly learning environment.

*School Improvement Plans.* Evaluated improvement plans were all current, in implementation during the 2012-2013 academic year. Documents for Historic Battle High and Suburban County High included a list of organizational beliefs. As these beliefs foster academic optimism, and, where applicable, espouse the developed core categories, these statements were considered part of the improvement plans for those

schools. The goals and objectives of College Town High School and their alignment with the established core themes of the three schools are illustrated in Appendix K. Appendix L aligns the goals, objectives, and beliefs of Historic Battle High with core the categories, while Appendix M contains relationship patterns for Suburban County High.

*Student Enrollment.* Each of the three schools enrolls a minimum of 30% of students in Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, of Governor's School programs meeting the criteria for well performing schools as defined in Chapter One. For the purposes of document and record analysis in the current chapter, those enrollments in highly rigorous, post-secondary education readiness courses are extended to include schools' programs of study and specific course offerings. Specially designed programs or pathways exhibit a school's expectations and overall emphasis on academics. Though different in make up, each of the three studied schools include such specially designed programs ranging from accelerated credit options at Suburban County High to a rigorous sequence of mathematics offerings at College Town High to specially designed career clusters at Historic Battle High School. In each instance, programs were crafted to improve college or workforce readiness by producing graduates who are prepared for challenging academic work and who have the skills necessary for success in the workplace. Further, each of the school's programs is dependent on students' beginning pathways during the middle grades. For example, students who choose one of the 16 career clusters at Historic Battle High begin those tracks in the seventh grade. Over 20% of students at College Town High maximize mathematics course offerings beginning with advanced mathematics as sixth graders and honors Algebra I in seventh grade. More detailed depictions of advancement initiatives are included as appendices. The

influence of these enrollment opportunities on students' achievement and program completion are reflected through each school's graduation percentages where 70.53% (SCHS), 58.9% (HBHS), and 45.29% (CTHS) of 2011 graduates earned Advanced Studies Diplomas accumulating 26 units or credits and verifying nine with minimal proficiency scores on Virginia Standards of Learning Assessments (VDOE, 2012).

### Core Categories and Themes Among Full Sample Interviews

Eighteen interviews produced over 12 hours of data as each participant conveyed his/her personal understanding of academic optimism, how that optimism exists at their respective school, and its relationship to students' achievement. As more specifically detailed in Chapter Three, 319 examples of academic optimism, including those that were replicated among participants were gathered and categorized under 71 themes, including those that were replicated across the three schools. Table 4.7 outlines total number of examples and categorized themes by property of academic optimism.

| | Examples (n) | Themes (n) | CTE* Examples (n) | CTE Themes (n) | AE* Examples (n) | AE Themes (n) | FT* Examples (n) | FT Themes (n) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| College Town | 139 | 21 | 42 | 9 | 51 | 10 | 46 | 8 |
| **Historic Battle** | 99 | **23** | 37 | **9** | 33 | **7** | 29 | **7** |
| **Suburban County** | 93 | **21** | 36 | **8** | 40 | **9** | 17 | **5** |
| Sample | 319 | **71** | 115 | **26** | 124 | **26** | 80 | **20** |

*CTE: Collective Teacher Efficacy, AE: Academic Emphasis, FT: Faculty Trust in Students and Parents

**Table 4.7** Examples and themes by property of academic optimism

Connecting themes to the conceptual framework developed in Chapter One, faculty from each of the three well performing high schools conveyed an organizational value for creating and maintaining a positive school environment. As a healthy school

climate, established norms, beliefs, and optimistic attitudes are facets of a positive learning environment, creating a culture where such prevail fosters the personal or cognitive functioning of schools and influences collective teacher efficacy. Hoy and his colleagues (2006) suggest that maintaining a positive, orderly learning environment not only fosters collective teacher efficacy but also trust in students as it allows professionals to view students as willing and parents as supportive. Similarly, academic emphasis is supported through organizational practices that promote the school's purpose as well as high academic and social expectations for its students. Thus, motivating students academically and socially, engaging students in the learning process, and extending students opportunities for enrichment or extra help advance the basic operational or behavioral functioning of schools. Finally, promoting schools that are inviting and connected to communities influences such external factors as parental and community involvement, environmental or affective school elements that shape trust between schools and the communities they serve. Table 4.8 represents the data that were most frequently accented during the interviews.

| Participant Example | Respondents Providing Example (N) | Element(s) of Academic Optimism |
|---|---|---|
| Positive climate maintained by principal | 16 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Collegiality and teamwork | 16 | CTE, FT |
| Open access to higher-level course offerings | 16 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Students viewed as capable of high achievement | 14 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Establishment of individual student interventions | 12 | AE, FT |
| Teachers believe they make a difference | 11 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Recognition of student achievement | 11 | AE, FT |
| After school remediation, corrective teaching | 11 | AE |
| Students collaborate for study outside of school | 11 | AE, FT |
| Teach students to make real-life connections | 11 | AE |
| Shared ownership of outcomes | 11 | AE, FT |
| Emphasis on continued improvement | 11 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Quarterly school events for families to attend | 10 | AE, FT |
| School-wide sense of community | 10 | CTE, FT |
| Parents viewed as responsive and supportive | 10 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Students and parents involved in planning | 9 | AE, FT |
| Teach students to integrate knowledge and make connections | 9 | AE |
| Orderly learning environment | 8 | CTE, AE, FT |
| Social support for students | 8 | AE, FT |
| Timely, open and honest communication | 8 | FT |
| Academic rigor, student engagement | 8 | CTE, AE, FT |

CTE-Collective Teacher Efficacy; AE-Academic Emphasis; FT-Faculty Trust in Students and Parents

**Table 4.8** Most frequent participant examples of academic optimism

*Emergent Categories of Academic Optimism*

Faculty from each of the three well performing high schools conveyed an organizational value for creating and maintaining a positive school environment. As a healthy school climate, established norms, beliefs, and optimistic attitudes are facets of a positive learning environment, creating a culture where such prevails fosters the personal or cognitive functioning of schools and influences collective teacher efficacy. Hoy and his colleagues (2006) suggest that maintaining a positive, orderly learning environment not only fosters collective teacher efficacy but also trust in students as it allows professionals to view students as willing and parents as supportive. Similarly, academic emphasis is supported through organizational practices that promote the school's purpose as well as high academic and social expectations for its students. Thus, motivating

students academically and socially, engaging students in the learning process, and extending students opportunities for enrichment or extra help advance the basic operational or behavioral functioning of schools. Finally, promoting schools that are inviting and connected to communities influences such external factors as parental and community involvement, environmental or affective school elements that shape trust between schools and the communities they serve. Table 4.9 connects the study's five emergent categories of academic optimism to themes developed through interview, observation, and document analyses.

| Category | Themes |
|---|---|
| **Creating a positive school environment** | Faculty views students as capable of high achievement<br>Faculty believes they make a difference in student achievement<br>Faculty views students as prepared to learn<br>Faculty wants students to be successful<br>Faculty values collegiality and collaboration<br>Faculty views parents as supportive<br>Faculty feels supported when trying new ideas<br>Faculty believes in each other as professionals<br>Positive climate is maintained by the principal<br>Faculty strives for continuous improvement |
| **Motivating students academically and socially** | Faculty maintains high academic expectations<br>Faculty promotes open enrollment in higher-level courses (i.e., IB, AP)<br>Faculty values social support for students (i.e., mentoring, citizenship, behavioral intervention)<br>Faculty preserves instructional time<br>Faculty recognizes student achievement |
| **Engaging students in the learning process** | Faculty teaches students to make connections through knowledge integration<br>Faculty leads students to make real-life connections to content<br>Faculty emphasizes college and workforce readiness<br>Faculty supports authentic classroom engagement<br>Faculty maintains an orderly learning environment |
| **Extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help** | Faculty encourages students to participate in athletics and extracurricular clubs and activities<br>Faculty employs individual student interventions<br>Faculty provides opportunities (during non-school hours) for corrective teaching<br>Faculty provides opportunities (during school hours) for corrective teaching<br>Community partners provide internships, tutoring options<br>Students collaborate for tutoring and support during non-school hours |
| **Promoting inviting, connected schools** | Faculty communicates in ways that are timely, open, and honest<br>Faculty views parents as responsive and supportive<br>Faculty attends school events (i.e., sports, arts performances, academic recognitions)<br>Faculty hosts regularly scheduled academic events for students and families<br>Faculty promotes a school-wide sense of community<br>Faculty directly involves students and parents in scheduling and program planning<br>Faculty supports students' self-advocacy<br>Faculty emphasizes and builds citizenship<br>Faculty, students, parents, and the community share school successes |

**Table 4.9** Main categories (organizational practices) of academic optimism among research sites

The emergent categories: creating a positive school environment; motivating students academically and socially; engaging students in the learning process; extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help; and promoting invited, well connected schools fit into the study's conceptual framework of academic optimism. Each of the five categories advances the operational, personal, and environmental functioning of schools to positively influence student achievement as indicated in Figure 1.1. Bandura's social cognitive theory conveys the human experience as one of action, forethought, intentionality, and choice (1986). The emergent categories reflect that the faculties at each of the three well performing high schools have developed collective beliefs about their abilities to perform at a high level of competence, set goals germane to their respective beliefs, and demonstrate high levels of resilience in pursuing goals regardless of difficulties and challenges. Moreover, research literature supports relationships between positive school environments, student motivation and engagement, extra help and enrichment opportunities for students, inviting schools and student achievement.

*Summary of the Emergent Categories and the Research Literature*

*Creating a Positive School Environment*

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi posited that negative or pessimistic emotions are counterproductive to personal actualization and fulfillment while the positive, more optimistic emotions broaden attention to thinking and can lead to the discovery of creative and new ideas, actions, and more meaningful social bonds (Ranchman, 1979; Gillham & Seligman, 1999; Seligman, 2002; Fredrickson, 2003). As positive emotions and healthy relationships lend to balanced life perspectives and optimal individual performance, they are as specifically significant to school interactions and dynamics

(Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006). Traditionally, talent and student motivation have been considered fundamental elements to student achievement. However, Seligman extends optimism as a third factor of academic success arguing that optimism matters as much as talent or motivation to positively influencing student achievement (Seligman, 1998, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006).

It is arguable whether a positive learning environment yields highly efficacious faculties or whether faculties with high levels of collective efficacy produce positive school environments. Faculty members provided their understandings of efficacy, individual and collective, through contexts exhibiting confidence that students came to school prepared for learning and the belief that students were capable of high achievement. These favorable perspectives connect Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk-Hoy's (2000) analyses of the teaching tasks (i.e., interpretations of abilities and motivations of students) and teaching competence (i.e., collective skill, training, and expertise) suggesting a degree of belief in students' capabilities to achieve as well as in their own professional abilities to influence positive learning outcomes. Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) determined that teachers' task analysis and overall group skill and competence combined to create a sense of collective teacher efficacy, representing judgments about the performance capability of the social system as a whole (Bandura, 1997). Such efficacy exhibits a sense of the possible and correlates with academic emphasis and trust creating an organization in which the faculty believes that "it can make a difference, that students can learn, and academic performance can be achieved" (Hoy et al., 2006, p. 145). Collective teacher efficacy is a central variable in explaining student achievement and is determined to be more important than either students' SES or

a school's overall emphasis on academics (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Hoy et al., 2002).

Consistently, participating faculty understand the principal's uniquely significant role in supporting a school climate that cultivates optimism and builds on students' talents and motivations. Studies indicate that there is little difference between high and low performing schools as far as classroom practices and formal structures are concerned (Chubb, 1988). However, the greatest distinctions were evident when school leadership was strong, expectations were high, and authority was delegated to the classroom (Chubb, 1988). Faculty frequently articulated delegated classroom authority within the context of feeling supported by school administration when trying new ideas or practices. Chubb's conclusions reinforce Weber's (1971) findings that the most common characteristics of successful schools included strong principal leadership, communication of high expectations for all students, and an orderly and pleasant learning environment. Further research suggests that in addition to the factors identified by Weber in 1971 and Chubb in 1988, principal leadership is critical to establishing instructional focus, developing standards for evaluating instructional quality, and maintaining the expectation that students will demonstrate skill mastery, all of which are critical to sustaining student achievement (Austin, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Goddard, Logerfo, & Hoy, 2004).

There is also an overwhelming value among faculty for principal-led opportunities that build teamwork, collegiality, and collaboration. Such value is supported in the research literature by Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) who propose that schools at which teachers are encouraged and supported to collectively explore solutions

to learning, motivation, and behavior challenges are likely to improve teachers' feeling of efficacy. Moreover, teachers benefit through sharing ideas, strategies, methods, and samples of student products as these practices allow them to collaboratively determine what works in improving student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Finally, faculties at studied schools view parents as supportive and understand that support as critical to student achievement. Most often parental support was conveyed as parents' responsiveness to school concerns. While such parental support contributes to trust dynamics between home and school, interviewed faculty also cited parents' support to promote their beliefs in their abilities to teach students. Though not many studies have examined the relationship, cooperation and trust should set the stage for student learning (Hoy, et al., 2006). Goddard and his colleagues (2001) demonstrated a significant direct relationship between faculty trust and higher student achievement noting that faculty trust, like collective teacher efficacy, was a key property enabling schools to overcome some of the challenges of low SES.

As part of a more in-depth review of the research literature in Chapter Two, collective efficacy represents perceptions of the performance capability of the social system as a whole and is a group attribute rather than the aggregate of individual teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1993, 1997, 2001). Thus, collective teacher efficacy involves more than mere positive thinking and optimism and is connected to the construct of agency, the individual and collective ability to identify challenges and take action to overcome those challenges (Bandura 1993, 1997, 2001). Goddard and his colleagues (Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000, 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004) were the catalysts in using collective efficacy as an

organizational construct citing collective efficacy's emphasis on optimism, well being, and moral and human agency fits well into the positive psychological perspective.

*Motivating Students Academically and Socially*

The sense of motivating students to achieve desired academic and social outcomes was developed through faculty understanding of the following: maintaining high academic expectations; promoting open enrollment in higher-level courses (i.e., IB, AP); providing social supports for students (i.e., mentoring, citizenship, behavioral intervention); preserving instructional time; and recognizing student achievement. These organizational actions closely connect with a school's emphasis on academics or academic press. Schools with a high level of academic emphasis set high but achievable goals for students; support a learning environment that is orderly and serious; motivate students to work hard; and promote respect for academic achievement (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006). Relationships between strong academic focus and student achievement have been consistently supported by research studies (Zigarelli, 1996; Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Hannum & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Erbe, 2000). More specifically, Lee and Bryk (1989) revealed a direct, positive correlation between a school's emphasis of academics and its students' achievement and further found that schools with more orderly and disciplined environments experienced less achievement distribution between minority and white students. Hoy and his colleagues (1991) replicated Lee and Bryk's study with consistent results conveying positive and direct relationships between academic press and student achievement in high schools after controlling for SES. Additionally, recognizing student achievement is a critical element of academic press, and schools that celebrate the

academic achievements of students (i.e., honor roll, national honor societies, academic assemblies, and displaying exemplary student work) foster academic emphasis (Hoy et al., 2006).

Participants attributed many of the actions of motivating students, particularly setting and communicating high academic expectations and recognizing student achievement, to principal leadership. The literature acknowledges principals' actions of emphasizing academic achievement and holding high expectations as having a significant influence on students' success; however, the influence is indirect. The direct relationship exists with classroom teachers who exhibit the same professional behaviors as the principal (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Oden & Oden, 2005; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006).

Shouse's (1996) study of nearly 400 schools identified three elements that contribute to motivating students academically and socially: academic climate; disciplinary climate; and the instructional practices of teachers. The disciplinary climates at each of the studied schools feature some form of scheduled mentorship or citizenship block. An example is College Town High School's advisory period, which is designed to promote diversity, citizenship, and academic support. Shouse continues to suggest that a school's academic climate is advanced through offering all students access to rigorous curriculum and regularly recognizing students' academic success (1996). Open access to rigorous curricula such as honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate course offerings is also supported through research literature on school membership where the psychological state of membership or school affiliation has been measured by observations of student behavior such as daily attendance, preparedness for learning, and

participation in class proceedings (Smerdon, 2002). Prior research indicates that adolescents with lower academic status (e.g., average or struggling students) are especially susceptible to feelings of low school membership (Calabrese, 1987; Smerdon, 2002). An example is provided through Trusty and Dooley-Dickey (1993) study, which found that students who had previously repeated a grade reported lower levels of school membership. Academically and socially disadvantaged students lack perceived affiliation because they have historically been denied full membership in their schools in terms of accessibility to advanced course offerings (Finn, 1989) resulting in feelings of being "disinvited" by adults and more successful fellow students (Goodenow, 1993). Finn (1989) exhorts that "disinvited" students may choose to withdraw from school psychologically and eventually physically citing diminished motivation and anti-academic norms such as skipping school or dropping out.

The research indicates that By virtue of access and active participation in an AP course, students' retention is improved, and students are more likely motivated by the opportunity to earn tuition free college credit (Klopfenstein, 2003).

*Engaging Students in the Learning Process*

Staff interviews, observations, and school document analyses all reveal an importance for enlisting students as partners in educational processes as a primary vehicle for building teacher-student relationships (trust), embracing academics, and supporting teacher efficacy. Commonalities among faculty responses, school improvement initiatives, and observations of classroom interactions across school sites recognize the following actions as significant to fostering student engagement in well performing high schools.

- Teaching students to make connections between content areas through integrating their knowledge.
- Leading students to make connections between content and real-life problem solving.
- Emphasizing college and workforce readiness.
- Supporting authentic classroom engagement.

Teachers described students' abilities to relate new information to existing or prior knowledge and to meaningfully connect or synthesize information across content areas (integrate knowledge) as essential skills. An example of such knowledge integration might exist between content in Virginia and United States History and content in American Literature, both of which are taught at the $11^{th}$ grade in Virginia. Literature from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s could be taught within the context of the economic prosperity and urbanization of the United States prior to the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the following Great Depression. For example, simply knowing the formula to calculate the area of a space is not as meaningful as being able to apply that knowledge in a practical context to solve a problem. Wiggins and McTighe contend, "It is not to help students get good at school, but rather to prepare them for the world beyond school—to enable them to apply what they have learned to issues and [real-life] problems they will face in the future" (p.37). This ideology, which the two refer to as learning for understanding, requires that curriculum and instruction address three distinct but interrelated academic goals: helping students acquire important information and skills; make personal meaning of content; and then effectively transfer their learning to new situations both within and beyond school. (Wiggins and McTighe, 2008). Research in

cognitive psychology also challenges the thinking that students must learn all of the facts and skills before they can address the main ideas of a topic or apply acquired skills in more complex and authentic ways to solve actual problems (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

In the previous section on motivating students academically and socially, the benefits of open access to higher-level courses and increased school membership or affiliation were supported by research literature. Both open access and membership practices are greatly dependent on a schools emphasis and efforts to engage students in learning experiences and extracurricular programs (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Willms, 2003). Though a consistent definition of student engagement does not exist in the research literature, student engagement is most conclusively considered a complex construct comprised of multiple dimensions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). According to Fredricks et al., engagement can best be understood as a series of relationships: between students and the school community, students and faculty, students and peers, students and instructional practices, and students and the curriculum (2004). Other research on engagement and achievement focuses on student behavior (i.e., self-advocacy and motivation) and school structures (i.e., norms, attendance, class sizes) and draws direct relationships between students' sense of belonging and students' sense of participation (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Shouse, 1996; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Willms, 2003). Willms (2003) discovered that students in schools with high levels of engagement tended have higher literacy skills. Willms further states that engagement is also important for students who immediately join the workforce.

*Extending Opportunities for Enrichment and Extra Help*

As previously mentioned, increased school membership or affiliation, specifically through open access to course offerings and school programs, positively influences student attendance and achievement (Calabrese, 1987; Finn, 1989; Tusty & Dickey-Dooley, 1993; Shouse, 1996; Smerdon, 2002). My investigation of three well-performing Virginia high schools produced information that conveys consistent faculty emphasis on enrichment and support opportunities as meaningful interventions for struggling students. Supporting increased membership or school affiliation, enrichment activities should by design extend learning opportunities through the inclusion of a range of co-curricular and extracurricular experiences for students (Wynn, 2002). Examples of such enrichments activities in high schools include athletic and club and activity participation, community service, and specialized programs (i.e., magnets for aviation studies, visual and performing arts, communications, etc.). Research indicates that students who participate in enrichment activities, particularly school athletics, not only experience greater school affiliation and increased achievement, but also earn higher wages and greater benefits as adults (Eide & Ronan, 2001; Ewing, 2007). A study by Kuhn and Weinberger (2005) shows that students who engage in enrichment and social school activities are more likely to assume leadership positions as adults.

Faculty and school documents at each of the studied schools affirm expectations that students assume participatory roles in school activities as well as to assume responsibility for taking advantage of tutoring and remediation opportunities as needed. In addition to encouraging activity participation, faculty cited the following key practices as critical to extending students opportunities for enrichment and extra help.

- Employing individual student interventions (academic emphasis, collective teacher efficacy);
- Providing opportunities (during school and non-school hours) for corrective teaching (academic emphasis, collective teacher efficacy);
- Relying on community partners to provide internships or tutoring (academic emphasis and faculty trust); and
- Encouraging students to collaborate for tutoring and support during non-school hours (academic emphasis and faculty trust in students).

Ruby Payne (2008) captures these and other practices as knowledge of individual resources proclaiming, "when you know the [available] resources of an individual, then you can determine the intervention(s) that will work best. Interventions that are successful work with the [students'] strengths to enhance his/her underdeveloped resources" (p. 2). Studies by Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000); Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004); and Schumacher (2009) also support the importance of remediation and intervention to student achievement.

*Promoting Inviting, Connected Schools*

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) investigated levels of faculty trust through four specific aims: measuring the faces of trust in school facilities; examining the factor structure of faculty trust; exploring the interrelationships between faculty trust in students, colleagues, and parents; and testing the relationship between faculty trust and parental collaboration. Though the researchers anticipated four factors of school trust, three emerged with faculty trust in students and faculty trust in parents combining to form

the single factor, faculty trust in clients, which would become the third property of academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006).

Additionally, Bryk and Schneider (as cited in Hoy et al., 2006) performed a three-year longitudinal investigation concluding that relational trust was a prime source of school improvement positively influencing attendance, persistent learning, and experimentation with new instructional practices. Trust is a necessity for organizational dynamics of leadership, team building, school-community partnership, goal setting, and performance evaluation (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). Even when faced with miscommunication or general disagreement, faculty trust in student and parents is critical to promoting school purpose and achieving goals (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, 2002).

Faculty identified timely, open, and honest communication as gateways to trusting relationships with students and parents. Each of the three schools subscribed to services, which granted parents online access to their children's grades and most current assessment data contributing to a culture of information sharing. Further faculty perceptions of parents as responsive and supportive was overwhelmingly positive and understood to derive from the schools' efforts to uphold trusting relationships. Hoy and his colleagues (2006) assert that viewing teachers as capable, students as willing, parents as supportive, and tasks as achievable are key indicators of trust. Joining these perspectives to the properties of academic optimism, the capability of teachers demonstrates collective efficacy; tasks are achievable through a persistent emphasis on academics; and established trust allows teachers to view their students as willing to achieve and parents as supportive (Hoy et al., 2006). Faculty at each school cited

examples of hosting regularly scheduled academic events and involving parents in their children's program planning and scheduling decisions as key contributors to developing trusting partnerships.

Faculty also understood that supporting students' self-advocacy and encouraging voice fostered trust and a sense of community within the school. When students are given opportunities to be incorrect without adverse consequences, and allowed to have more self-directed or student-led learning experiences, they develop resilience and greater trust (Ryff & Singer, 2003). When asked about the types of things teachers can do to build trust with students, a common response among participants was to attend their school related events such as sports, performances, and academic recognition ceremonies. Teachers, administrators, and school counselors understand that visibility outside of the academic setting communicates interest and support and advances relationships within the classroom. Finally, well-performing schools were presented as places where successes are widely promoted and shared by all stakeholders: faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community.

# CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*The true function of philosophy is to educate us in the principles of reasoning and not to put an end to further reasoning by the introduction of fixed conclusions.*

~George Henry Lewes

Presenting the study's implications to school leadership practice, Chapter Five is divided into four sections. Section one provides a summary of the investigation highlighting the study's guiding question and a discussion of the relevance of the findings. The second section specifies the implications for administrative practice emphasizing what might be done with the discovered knowledge. Section three further develops the study's limitations, which were originally presented in Chapter Three. Finally, the fourth section includes recommendations for further study.

### *Purpose and General Summary of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to determine how faculties at well performing high schools understand and identify the organizational characteristics and behaviors that foster and sustain academic optimism as a mechanism of student achievement. The study parallels Martin Seligman's (1998) positive psychological perspective, the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and what goes right in life. In the framework of public schools, an optimistic outlook accents those behaviors and practices that work to improve the organization rather than emphasizing shortcomings and other external variables that exist outside the influence of school personnel. Among the results of early studies on effective schools cited in Chapter Two, several commonly recognized organizational properties, which consistently correlate with sustained academic achievement, have

emerged. Among those elements are collective teacher efficacy, faculty trust in students and parents, and academic emphasis. Underscoring these attributes as predictors of student achievement, Hoy and his colleagues developed the construct of academic optimism as a school's collective sense of purpose and potential across a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Collective teacher efficacy is a group orientation and is cognitive; academic emphasis describes purposeful academic actions and is behavioral; and faculty trust in students and their parents is an emotional, affective dynamic.

This study adds to the existing body of research literature drawing positive and direct relationships between the tenets of academic optimism: collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents and student achievement. The investigation endorses Albert Bandura's 1986 *Social Foundations of Though and Action's* social cognitive theory accenting the human experience, in this instance the educational experience, as one of action, forethought, intentionality, and choice. Additionally, the study explores optimism as a factor of student achievement and is aligned with Seligman's positive psychology seeking to determine the nature of effective functioning of humans, average people, who successfully apply evolved adaptations and learned skills challenging the field of conventional psychology with the adoption of more open and appreciative perspectives regarding human potential, motives, and capacities (Sheldon & King, 2001).

The findings outlined in Chapter Four convey the understandings of academic optimism of faculties at three successful Virginia high schools. Participating faculty cited 319 examples illustrating their respective school's practices that promote collective

teacher efficacy, an emphasis on academics, and faculty trust in students and parents. Initial coding of interview data classified the 319 examples into 71 categories or axial codes (including duplications across sites) including 26 for collective teacher efficacy, 26 for academic emphasis, and 19 for faculty trust in students and parents. The 71 axial codes were further analyzed through a selective coding process and divided into five inclusive core themes, each with specific supporting organizational practices that foster academic optimism. The five core themes include creating a positive school environment, motivating students academically and socially, engaging students in the learning process, extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help, and promoting inviting, connected schools.

Based on Bandura's model of triadic reciprocal determinism, the conceptual framework for the study explains the construct of academic optimism and its relationship to student achievement in context exhibiting school operations from a social cognitive perspective to determine how personal and organizational factors influence each other bi-directionally and act as co-predictors of human functioning. To investigate such relationships, a variety of social and educational factors were considered: student factors such as prior academic achievement, readiness and motivation; teacher factors such as planning, efficacy, and instructional delivery; and organizational factors such as trust, leadership and support. There are also external factors, those elements beyond the control of school personnel such as the school's geographic location (i.e., urban, rural, wealthy or poor locality), students' demographics (i.e., Limited English Proficiency), and socioeconomic status. In the face of these challenges rests increasing accountability standards requiring school leaders to establish and maintain organizational climates that

support teacher collaboration and professional development and are consistent with the school's general mission to improve student achievement. The study is timely as there is a developing research base, which recognizes both the individual properties of academic optimism and academic optimism as a unified construct as contributors to students' success. However, very little information exists to assist school leaders in identifying the organizational practices that lend to sustained academic optimism. Thus the emergent categories, thematic practices of the studied well performing high schools, may serve as relevant and practical courses of action for all school leaders seeking to bolster the levels of academic optimism in their respective organizations. The data gathered during the study clearly and consistently reveal that creating a positive school environment, motivating students academically and socially, engaging students in the learning process, extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help, and promoting inviting, connected schools are shared practices of schools in which faculty believes in their collective ability to reach all students regardless of the challenges, maintains an organizational emphasis on academics, and exhibits trust for students and students' families.

Observations of student and teacher interactions in the instructional setting and a review of school documents not only served to validate some of the data gathered through participant interviews, but deepened my understanding of faculty's interpretations of optimism. Using an example shared in Chapter Three, evidence of students employing voice, self-advocacy, would be sought to validate faculty perceptions of high levels of student voice as a contributor to academic emphasis or faculty trust.

I acknowledge that a remaining question may challenge whether a school's high levels of academic optimism yield increased student achievement or if high levels of

demonstrated student achievement produce a more efficacious faculty that values a press for academics and trust. However, the findings of this study suggest practices that afford school leaders opportunities to sustain optimistic school cultures that influence students' success regardless of which element actuates the other. Essentially, leaders in schools where there has not been a history of enduring academic success stand to benefit from employment of the common practices of well performing schools.

*Implications for Leadership Practice*

Each of the last three Presidents of the United States has introduced measures of sweeping educational reform. Clinton's Goals 2000 Educate America Act, Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, and Obama's educational incentives through Race to the Top initiatives are the most recent of numerous reform campaigns since Equality of Educational Opportunity report in 1966. Based on what I have learned about academic optimism in the course of this study, I offer the following recommendations for leadership practice to aid school administrators in fostering a culture of academic optimism in high schools driving students' academic success:

1. *Create a Positive School Environment.* The data gathered in this study support that school faculties rely heavily on the principal to maintain a positive academic climate by clearly emphasizing high academic expectations for all students, supporting and acknowledging faculty who try new and innovative ideas, and promoting the belief that the collective work of staff truly makes a difference in students' success. Consistently, the data indicate that high school faculties value opportunities for collaboration and collegiality, and school leadership should extend such opportunities through meaningful and practical

staff development and scheduling occasions for vertical and horizontal teaming. School leaders might also maintain continuous improvement as a chief pursuit building reliance on data from a variety of sources (i.e., achievement, attendance, enrollment) as a guide for collaborative strategic planning. Lastly, even upper secondary schools benefit from parental involvement and support, and leaders of optimistic schools have to lead and engage parents to contributing that type of involvement, particularly in high schools where parents are more likely to disconnect from their children's social and learning experiences. Each of the three studied schools had some form of parental advisory beyond the Parent Teacher Organization or the Parent, Teacher, Student Association.

2. *Motivate students academically and socially.* Without practices that support students' success, high expectations may as well not exist. High schools that perform well do so, in part, through communicating a relentless value for instructional time. This value is understood by students and faculty and should prohibit unnecessary instructional interruptions (i.e., public address announcements, student tardiness). As a method of motivating students, school leaders might support open access to rigorous curricula such as honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate course offerings to increase students' membership and school affiliation. Adolescents with lower academic status (e.g., average or struggling students) are especially susceptible to feelings of low school membership and lack perceived positive affiliation because they have historically been denied full membership in their schools in

terms of accessibility to advanced course offerings (Finn, 1989; Smerdon, 2002). Open enrollment practices not only improve school membership but also increase students' preparedness for post-secondary education (Klopfenstein, 2003) as a student's enrollment in an Advance Placement course "signals to college and university admissions officers that [the student] is prepared for college level work" (2003, p.116). Leaders at well performing high schools encourage faculty to provide social support for students through mentoring, citizenship development, and individual behavioral intervention and recognize both academic and social achievements (i.e., good citizenship, perfect attendance).

3. *Engage students in the learning process.* According to Fredricks et al. (2004), engagement can best be understood as a series of relationships: between students and the school community, students and faculty, students and peers, students and instructional practices, and students and the curriculum. Traditionally students have come to school only to be subjected to instructional decisions that were made absent of their voice and participation. Administrators at studied schools rely on students as partners in the teaching and learning processes welcoming their participation and influence on instructional decision making. Leaders, who engage students in the learning process, promote instruction that teaches students to make content connections through integration. Essentially, students are challenged to make meaningful and logical connections between prior knowledge and new material and or draw relationships among content learned across discipline or subject areas. The

perspective that meaningful learning involves connecting new information to existing knowledge is not a novelty. Rather, the view is fundamental to Piaget's (1949) general learning theory of assimilation and accommodation. More recently, the high school's focus on teaching for knowledge acquisition at the expense of meaning making and integrating content has been investigated by Wiggins and McTighe (2008), who suggest that the mission of high school is no longer to familiarize students with content, but to help them become more thoughtful about and productive with learned information. Affording students opportunities to connect content to real-life experiences was common practice at studied schools where teaching students to simply knowing the formula for calculating the area of a space is not as meaningful as teaching students to apply that knowledge in a practical context to solve a real-life problem. Wiggins and McTighe (2008) contend, "It is not to help students get good at school, but rather to prepare them for the world beyond school—to enable them to apply what they have learned to issues and [real-life] problems they will face in the future" (p.37). This ideology, which is referred to as learning for understanding, requires that curriculum and instruction address three distinct but interrelated academic goals: helping students acquire important information and skills; make personal meaning of content; and then effectively transfer their learning to new situations both within and beyond school. (Wiggins and McTighe, 2008).

4. *Extend students opportunities for enrichment and extra help.* Strategic school leaders understand that it most often requires more than six and a half hours per

day to positively influence student achievement. Thus, data from this study indicate common practices that extend the school day through various remediation activities such as corrective teaching before or after school. Two of the three studied schools also had successful peer tutoring programs in which students selected their own tutor from a volunteer list and coordinated help sessions outside of school. In addition to individualized academic interventions, opportunities for enrichment through activities such as field trips and participation in school clubs, activities, and athletics also contribute to student achievement. Leadership practices that encourage student involvement in school activities promote citizenship, collaboration, and leadership skills, which serve students beyond academic contexts and settings. Research on school enrichment and achievement focuses on student behavior (i.e., self-advocacy, motivation, and leadership) and school structures (i.e., norms, attendance, class sizes) and draws direct relationships between students' senses of belonging and academic and extracurricular participation (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Willms, 2003). Willms (2003) discovered that students in schools with high levels of curricular and extracurricular engagement tended have higher literacy skills. Studied schools all enlist community agencies for student internship experiences, which also support learners to draw connections between learned material and real-world contexts in the workplace.

5. *Promote inviting, connected schools.* Early effective schools research presents trust between schools and families by identifying home-school partnerships as

primarily pervasive and significant elements of healthy and successful schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). As effective communication is a fundamental variable of trust, leaders of well performing schools promote timely, open, and honest communication with students and parents. Part of that communication includes engaging faculty in conversations and development initiatives that foster students' self-advocacy, nurtures school citizenship, and promotes a school-wide sense of community. Inviting and connected schools have faculty that view parents as reliable, trusting that students' families will be responsive and supportive during times of success and adversity. Further, school leaders benefit from measures that directly involve students and their parents in academic planning activities such as scheduling. Bryk and Schneider (as cited in Hoy et al., 2006) performed a three- year longitudinal investigation concluding that relational trust was a prime source of school improvement positively influencing student attendance, persistent learning, and faculty experimentation with new instructional practices. Trust is a necessity for organizational dynamics of leadership, team building, school-community partnership, and goal setting. Even when faced with miscommunication or general disagreement, faculty trust in students and parents is critical to promoting school purpose and achieving goals (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Hoy, 2002). When asked about the types of things administrators and teachers can do to build trust with students, a common response among the study's participants was to attend their school related events such as sports, arts performances, and academic

recognition ceremonies. Teachers, administrators, and school counselors convey the understanding that visibility outside of the academic setting communicates interest and support and advances relationships within the classroom. Finally, well-performing schools were presented as places where successes are widely promoted and shared by all stakeholders: faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community.

The implications for administrative practice fit well into the conceptual framework developed in Chapter One conveying reciprocal relationships among the personal, operational, and environmental functioning of schools. Personal or cognitive functions such as climate, norms, and beliefs advance collective teacher efficacy. The operational or behavioral function of schools involves actions based on organizational vision, purpose, and expectations and influence academic emphasis. And environmental or affective operations of schools align external forces such as community and parental involvement, which work to shape faculty trust in students and parents.

*Limitations of the Study*

Six faculty members from each school, a total of 18, were selected as interview participants comprising less than five percent of the total number of faculty members at the three schools. While the examples provided to convey understanding of academic optimism and its relationship to students' achievement were plentiful, it is likely that they do not perfectly capture the understandings and perspectives of every faculty member at each high school.

*Recommendations for Further Study*

Though evolving, academic optimism remains a relatively new construct with a fairly limited research base. This study examined the relationships between the elements of academic optimism and student achievement in well performing high schools considering correlations between faculty sense and understandings of academic optimism and student achievement. Future studies should seek to more deeply explore causation attempting to determine whether optimism benefits academic success or whether high student achievement more effectively accommodates faculty optimism.

Also, the findings of the study represent a sample including only three well performing Virginia High Schools. Though sampled schools were from distinct geographic regions of the state, each location can be described as suburban and serves students who come from predominantly middle class homes. As previously mentioned, the homogeneity of studied schools was driven mainly by the researcher's accessibility to the sites. I acknowledge that there are also urban and rural Virginia schools that meet the criteria outlined in Chapter Three for well performing high schools. Further research might examine the shared successful practices of those schools as well as those successful learning organizations with varying student socioeconomic status.

*Conclusion*

Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith (2002) acknowledge that many of the external forces that impact schooling such as SES and demographics exist beyond the general control of educators. Nonetheless, the research literature presented along with the findings of this investigation suggest that optimistic practices that foster teacher's sense of collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Goddard 2001; Goddard & Goddard 2002; Tschannen-

Moran & Barr, 2004) along with the organization's emphasis on academics (Lee & Bryk, 1989; Hoy et al., 1998; Hoy et al., 2002; Hoy et al., 2006) and a commitment to trusting relationships (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998, 2000; Goddard et al., 2001) yield positive student achievement outcomes regardless of SES or demographics.

This study's results confirm that collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and faculty trust in students and parents hold strong individual and collective relationships to student achievement. This remains factual even when other factors such as SES, and students' prior achievement are controlled. Schools that emphasize creating a positive environment, motivating students academically and socially, engaging students in the learning process, extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help, and promoting inviting, connected environments better establish learners for academic success. The study's outcomes do not suggest theoretical concepts to school leaders. Rather, the findings extend realistic and manageable practices that sustain an organizational sense of academic optimism and contribute to students' achievement.

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# APPENDIX A

## Collective teacher efficacy codes by theme, CTHS

| Collective Teacher Efficacy Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Students capable of high achievement | high performing, high flyers, rigor, critical thinking, higher order thinking, scores, SAT, Advanced Placement, grades, college |
| Teachers make difference in student achievement | corrective teaching, remediation, practice, relationships, expectations, support, communication, belief, pedagogy, skills |
| Positive climate maintained by principal | order, discipline, norms, expectations, culture, climate, morale, longevity, few interruptions, scheduling , management, building character |
| Collegiality and teamwork | common planning, common assessments, vertical teaming, teamwork, collaboration, morale, benchmarks, autonomy |
| Opportunities for peer observation | walkthroughs, mentorships, conferencing |
| Parental support | rely on parents, responsive parents, supportive parents, helicopter parenting, involved parents |
| Students motivated to learn | prepared, serious, eager, motivated, excited, hard working, easy to redirect |
| Mentors for new faculty members | support, planning, management, development |
| Applicable staff development | useable, addresses school needs, improvement, well-planned, timely |

# APPENDIX B

## Academic emphasis codes by theme, CTHS

| Academic Emphasis Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Academic and social expectations posted | clear expectations, chartered Knights, codes, ethics, citizenship, coexistence, participation, engagement, effort, attendance, awareness of GPA, elimination of class rank, grades |
| Student Interventions | individualized, MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) testing, data tracking, pretest/post test |
| Access to upper-level courses (i.e., Honors, AP, IB) | open enrollment, pre-requisites, expectations to attempt honors courses, academic rigor, college readiness, advanced studies diplomas, SAT success, college admission, critical thinking, student-led |
| After school remediation, corrective teaching | peer tutoring, teachers available after school hours, before school hours, Saturday blitzes, senior Saturdays |
| Remediation, re-teaching opportunities built into schedule | double blocks, coupled courses, paired classes, enrichment |
| University partnerships for internships, tutoring | 21st century skills, internships, math tutoring |
| Awards and incentives | BUG (Bring up Your Grades Awards), quarterly honor roll assemblies, public recognitions, breakfasts, inductions, principal's list |
| Orderly school environment | respect for school values, behavioral intervention, emphasis on discipline not punishment, expectations |
| Communicated value for instructional time | no random PA announcements, announcements only between classes, morning announcements, afternoon announcements, 93-97 minute blocks, warning bells for tardies, preserving class time |
| Collaboration in planning | interdisciplinary lesson designs, vertical teaming, collaboration, benchmarks, curriculum maps |

# APPENDIX C

## Faculty trust in students and parents codes by theme, CTHS

| Faculty Trust Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Members (faculty, students, students' families) assume the best of each other | benefit of doubt, good intentions, advocacy, support, family, accountability, connections |
| Classrooms operate as communities | roles, expectations, rules, norms, culture, orderly environment, respect, procedures, routines |
| Parents are viewed as responsive and supportive | availability, responsive, partners, partnerships, attend/support school events, correct behavior, conferences |
| Faulty cares about students as individuals | interventions, character development, extra help, availability, relationships |
| Citizenship is valued and promoted | compassion, understanding, respect, rights, differences, tolerance, values, tradition, responsibilities |
| Faculty supports students at school events | visibility, support, connections, relationships, familiarity |
| Student are self-advocates | trust, right, responsibilities, decision making, self-direction, voice, leaders, respect |
| School maintains regular communication | access to online grade books, newsletters, telephone broadcasts, websites, emails from teachers, routine conference nights, student progress reports |

# APPENDIX D

## Collective teacher efficacy codes by theme, HBHS

| Collective Teacher Efficacy Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Teachers make a positive difference in students' lives | character building, responsibility, modeling, adulthood, work ethic, habits of mind, citizenship, community, relationships |
| Collegiality and teamwork | morale, family, dependence on each other, friendships, teamwork, advice, relationships, working together, support, caring, trust, sharing ideas |
| Working for continuous improvement | getting better, data, goals, measurements, strategies, interventions, partnerships, improvement, results |
| Relevant and practical staff development | school improvement, needs based, matches goals, brief but meaningful, good use of meeting time, departmentalized, usable, teachers involved in PD planning |
| Students are capable of high achievement | college focus, ready, skills over content, critical thinking, grades, grade point average, technology, admissions, honors or AP, competition, global focus |
| Teachers are supported to try new ideas | best practice, risk taking, sharing, planning, research, creativity, do what works, ideas |
| Teachers are supported in discipline matters | discipline, administrative support, acceptable behavior, appropriate behavior, expectations, respect, accountability, support, punishment, compliance, parental support, |
| Principal leadership | visibility, approachability, supports teams, vocal, tone setting, accessible to students, focused, encouraging, leader, builds morale |
| Every [student] can and will learn | values, programs, beliefs, success, expectations, responsibility, goals |

# APPENDIX E

## Academic emphasis codes by theme, HBHS

| Academic Emphasis Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| High academic expectations for all students | standards, grades, progress, high expectations, achievement, academic success, values, outcomes |
| Open enrollment for advanced courses | Higher-order thinking, critical thinking, challenge, open enrollment, elimination of "grade level" courses, participation |
| Student collaboration outside of school | student scheduled, paired with higher performers, evening/weekend peer tutoring, volunteer points, community service, National Honor Society, student understanding |
| Teacher availability during non-school hours | smaller groups, clarity/clarification, remediation by individual deficiency, extra time, individualized time, redirect students |
| Emphasis on college and career readiness | rigorous work, challenging, application, applying knowledge, making connections, work related skills, tasks, communication, students working together, critical thinking, synthesis, real-world experiences, Lifelong learning, personal contexts |
| Orderly and productive school environment | doing what's right, responsibilities, following rules and regulations, choices, being prepared, relationships, procedures, appropriate behavior, arriving on time, demonstrating kindness, community atmosphere |
| Teacher academic autonomy | encouraged to take risks, try new ideas, share ideas, strategies, creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, rewards, innovation |

APPENDIX F

Faculty trust in students and parents codes by theme, HBHS

| Faculty Trust Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Timely communication | student intervention memos, parent resources, program of studies, program planning, mass broadcasts (telephone, SMS text, email), current website, accessibility to students' grades (online grade books) |
| Emphasis on relationships | service, belief, partnerships, support, trust, value for each other, tone setting, respect, quality interactions, focused on students |
| Teachers can rely on parents for support | PTSA, band boosters, responsive-return correspondence, calls, solution centered, willingness to help, offer feedback, value for education communicated at home, commitment to students |
| Students encouraged to participate in athletics and activities | School connection, common ground, parental support, teacher-staff attendance, student buy-in, community buy-in, affiliation, school spirit, leadership development, fully developed, well-rounded students, citizenship, dedication, sense of family |
| Students encouraged to advocate for themselves | self-directed students, students as decision makers, planners, surveys, leadership, SGA, classroom democracies, students' opinions valued |
| Faculty members trust each other | sense of team and community, honesty, leadership and support, courageous conversation, dependency on each other, principal, commitment to students |
| Students, parents viewed as partners | cooperation, roles, involvement, decision making, planning, course selection, responsibilities, diploma tracking, surveys |

# APPENDIX G

## Collective teacher efficacy codes by theme, SCHS

| Collective Teacher Efficacy Themes | Individual Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Principal leadership promotes morale and positive climate | positive morale and climate, principal visibility, administrative support, orderly flow of the school day, principal support of school events, communicates high expectations, team building, inspires belief |
| Opportunities for teachers to plan and work collaboratively | school improvement, staff development groups across content areas, ninth grade team, team teaching for integration, communication, support, sharing ideas, stories, learning from each other, discussing common students, making common assessments |
| Continuous improvement | all means all (100%), relevant improvement goals, teachers involved with strategic planning, analyzing results (quarterly grades, classroom assessments, benchmarks, state tests), focus on all students, buy-in, school pride |
| Teachers' belief in and support each other | mentoring, honest feedback, relationships, friendships outside the workplace, sharing ideas, team |
| Supportive parents | involved families, parents easy to reach, responsive, assistive with academic and social concerns, volunteers, support extracurricular events, contribute to school newsletter, blog, help with strategic planning at divisional and school levels |
| Teachers view students as prepared for learning | students are academically competitive, accountable, college bound, self-directed, motivated, responsible, goal-driven, value learning experiences, complex thinkers |
| Meaningful staff development | choices, action research, cross-curricular, instruction-based, specific, brief, routine, aligned with school goals, support morale, teamwork |
| Student growth as a factor of teacher evaluation | belief in reaching all students, focus on specific student's growth, data-based, all students matter, emphasis on individual student |

# APPENDIX H

## Academic emphasis codes by theme, SCHS

| Academic Emphasis Themes | Initial Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Recognition of student achievement | Grades, grade point average, awards, principal's list, honor roll, assemblies, academic letters, incentives, college admission wall |
| Interventions for struggling students | AP/IB labs, structured study blocks, remediation, peer support plans, teacher tutoring sessions, progress reporting, mentorship |
| Real-world (practical) learning experiences | connect life experiences to learning experiences, apply knowledge, relevance |
| High academic expectations | integrity, goals, goal attainment, college readiness, admission, minimal 3.0 grade point average, good grades |
| Reliance on student data | marking period grades, benchmarks, state test results, student performance reports, general testing, SAT trend data |
| Access to upper-level courses | challenging coursework, academic rigor, college readiness, support, IB diploma, open enrollment, student organization, tolerance, courage, competitiveness |
| Orderly school environment | quiet, few disruptions, values, order, behavioral expectations, scheduling supports teaching and learning, respect, vision |
| Knowledge integration, students making personal connections | making connections, curriculum alignment, critical thinking, students apply knowledge, teaming, planning |
| Healthy competition among students | weighted courses, hard workers, merit scholars, scholarships, good grades, GPA, integrity, globally competitive students, college-focused |

# APPENDIX I

Faculty trust in students and parents codes by theme, SCHS

| Faculty Trust Themes | Initial Teacher Codes |
|---|---|
| Faculty trust for each other | positive climate, service to others, [illegible] leadership, pursuit of excellence |
| Faculty view students and parents as partners | responsible, dependable, partners, willing to take roles, communication, involvement, planning, support |
| Students' extracurricular affiliation with the school | [illegible] participate in [illegible] athletics, attendance at school events, band, arts |
| School's emphasis on open, honest communication | electronic newsletters, blogs, quarterly conferencing, contact logs, current website, automated message delivery, principal/parent forums |

APPENDIX J

School Mission/Vision statements and the core categories of academic optimism

| School Vision/Mission Statement | Creating a positive school environment | Motivating students academically and socially | Engaging students in the learning process | Extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help | Promoting inviting, connected schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| College Town's vision of "Personal and Academic Excellence Inspired by a Collaborative and Innovative Learning Environment" calls for educational strategies, interventions, and programs that address the diverse needs of its student population. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| The mission of Historic Battle High School is to provide each student the opportunity to fulfill learning potential and to reinforce values of personal responsibility and accountability. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | |
| Suburban County High School promotes a quality educational environment that encourages the development of positive, life-long academic and leadership skills, allowing us to meet the challenges of a global society. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | |

# APPENDIX K

## Evidence of core categories in CTHS improvement goals and objectives

| | | Creating a positive school environment | Motivating students academically and socially | Engaging students in the learning process | Extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help | Promoting inviting, connected schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **College Town** | All students will graduate prepared for post-secondary education and active participation in society. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | |
| | • Embed critical and strategic thinking, problem solving, collaboration, creativity, and multimedia communication into instruction in all areas. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Provide rigorous, relevant curriculum through quality instruction challenging students at all levels. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Establish a school and community culture in which post-secondary education is an expectation for all students. | ★ | | | | ★ |
| | Our school will partner with families and the community to meet the academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of each student. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | ★ |
| | • Encourage healthy activities and behaviors for students and staff. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | |
| | Our school will be an optimal teaching and learning environment, a place for excellence and equity for all. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | |
| | • Create a school culture that values diversity and learning, and holds high expectations for all. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | ★ |
| | • Decrease achievement gaps between subgroups. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | • Ensure school reflects a culture of collaboration, respectful relationships, and teamwork among staff and students. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | ★ |
| | • All students and teachers will have access to a variety of blended and virtual learning environments. | ★ | | ★ | ★ | |

# APPENDIX L

## Evidence of core categories in HBHS improvement goals and objectives

| | | Creating a positive school environment | Motivating students academically and socially | Engaging students in the learning process | Extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help | Promoting inviting, connected schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Historic Battle** | Our students will consistently demonstrate excellence in the skills and knowledge needed for citizenship and productive participation in the global community | ★ | ★ | | | |
| | • The number of students scoring in the top quartile nationally on the SAT will increase 10 percent. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • The number of scores of 3 or higher on Advanced Placement Exams will increase by 5 percent annually. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • The percentage of high school graduates earning an Advanced Studies Diploma out of the total number of diplomas awarded will increase by 5 percentage points. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | We will engage all students in rigorous educational experiences. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Our school will continue to provide engaging, rigorous opportunities for student learning through multiple magnet/thematic programs. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Staff will continue integration of digital technologies into curriculum guides to support the development of 21st Century learning skills | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • The number of high school students earning career and technical certifications, state licenses, or successfully completing national occupational assessment credentials will increase annually by 5 percent. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | We will promote safe and secure school climates and positive relationships among and between students, staff members, parents and our community | ★ | ★ | ★ | | ★ |
| | • Staff will continue to implement and refine strategies annually to promote positive relationships among students | ★ | ★ | ★ | | ★ |
| | • Our school will interact and engage with the local and broader community in a variety of ways | ★ | | | | ★ |
| **Beliefs** | Student achievement is the core priority of the school. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | Student achievement is more than performance on standardized tests. | | ★ | | ★ | |
| | Faculty must be dedicated to positive learning outcomes for all students. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | Parental and community involvement are essential. | ★ | ★ | | | ★ |
| | Educational programs will help prepare students for career choices. | ★ | ★ | | | |
| | Data should be used to inform and adjust instruction. | | | | | |
| | Student wellness supports student achievement. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |

# APPENDIX M

## Evidence of core categories in SCHS improvement goals and objectives

| | | Creating a positive school environment | Motivating students academically and socially | Engaging students in the learning process | Extending opportunities for enrichment and extra help | Promoting inviting, connected schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Suburban County** | Provide the highest quality education and appropriate support for each student while exceeding state and national standards. | | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Increase student achievement and academic performance. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Integrate technology as a learning tool and promote technical education as a professional option. | | | | | |
| | Ensure a safe, secure and efficient learning environment. | ★ | ★ | | | ★ |
| | • Continually evaluate and refine safety and security plans. | | | | | |
| | Increase and sustain family involvement, community partnerships, and student engagement. | ★ | ★ | ★ | | ★ |
| | • Promote, mission, beliefs, and vision. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ |
| | • Communicate a value of a SCHS education. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | • Identify opportunities to increase family, business, and community involvement. | ★ | | | | ★ |
| | • Promote community service and citizenship. | ★ | ★ | | | ★ |
| **Beliefs** | A quality education encourages each child and challenges him or her to develop an individual path to success. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | A safe, supportive, and collaborative environment is essential to student development and achievement. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | All students should be prepared to be contributing, productive members of our diverse, global society. | | ★ | | | ★ |
| | Excellence is the standard for continuous improvement in teaching and learning. | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | |
| | Continued success of the school is dependent upon strong community partnerships. | ★ | | | | ★ |

# VITA

Michael Tyrone Cromartie

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| | |
|---|---|
| 2008-2013 | The College of William and Mary<br>Williamsburg, VA<br>Doctor of Education |
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Career Experiences:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1996-2003 | English Teacher<br>Woodside High School<br>Newport News, VA |
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| 2006-2007 | Principal<br>Phoebus High School<br>Hampton, VA |
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