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A Case Study: An Assessment of Student Engagement as a Basis for the Redesign of a Small High School

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A CASE STUDY: AN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AS A BASIS FOR THE REDESIGN OF A SMALL HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Preparing high school students for work in a global economy means that high schools must reinforce personal and social responsibility inside and outside of school and simultaneously seek opportunities for students to engage in educational activities that are relevant in a changing world. This study assessed administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of high school programs based on reports by students about their school experiences based on responses given on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). These perceptions served as a basis for administrators to begin a redesign plan for a small high school. The design of this study used quantitative data collected on the HSSSE (2007) to assess student engagement and qualitative research methods to assess the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school. Furthermore, this study attempted to develop recommendations for how data on student engagement might inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee.

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As I began Chapter V, my beloved father, Edward Feit, Ph.D., became ill. Our final conversation was about my dissertation, the challenges he faced writing his dissertation, and his pride in my seeking this educational accomplishment.

During the final days of his life, I sat at his bedside and wrote Chapter V. I typed, and when he needed comfort, I leaned over the railings of his bed and held his hand.

My father taught me to love learning, and he encouraged me to remain curious, read, explore, build, create, and seek beauty. I cannot thank him enough for all that he gave me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Preparing high school students for work in a global economy means that high schools must reinforce personal and social responsibility inside and outside of school and simultaneously seek opportunities for students to engage in educational activities that are relevant in a changing world.

Small high schools provide a viable opportunity for a response to change in the delivery and structure of secondary education that will prepare American students to enter a competitive global workforce (Small Schools Project, 2005). In order to initiate substantial school improvement efforts, administrators in successful small high schools need models of replicable, systemic redesign plans that are based on knowledge of student engagement, go beyond traditional curriculum and scheduling structures, and provide flexible innovative approaches to program

development (Shannon & Blysma, 2006). Models for plans and programs that support student achievement, maintain school relevance, prepare students for careers in emerging industries, develop talent, and build a foundation for lifelong learning require a collaborative process between principal adult stakeholders (administrators, teachers, and parents). They also must include students as active participants in shaping their futures (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Although student engagement data and student voice has been utilized in school improvement efforts, those efforts have largely focused on closing the achievement gap in failing schools, reductions in high dropout rates, and improving graduation rates. Therefore, there is a need for successful small high schools to create, implement, and share replicable plans with other small high schools as American secondary schools continue reform efforts in the 21st century.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of high

school programs based on reports by students about their school experiences. Students' responses given on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) provided a data source from which to glean student perceptions. These perceptions served as a basis for administrators to begin a redesign plan for a small high school.

Research Questions

The design of this study used quantitative data to assess student engagement and qualitative research methods to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?
2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?
3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of school programs redesigned to help students' gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness and social responsibility? (Partnership for the 21st Century, 2005).

Significance of the Study

There is little research devoted to the study of student engagement and student perceptions of program effectiveness as a basis for school redesign in successful small high schools. Therefore, the goals of this study are threefold. The first goal was to use data on student engagement, collected in a small high school, to elevate students' achievement through programs that enhance school relevance and increase individualized opportunities. The second goal was to integrate standards of practice used in Internet Web-based global work environments into this small high school's curricular and extracurricular programs so that students are better prepared for post-secondary educational opportunities (Friedman, 2005). The third goal was to develop a program redesign plan that may lead to further studies in other small high schools.

The results of this study are anticipated to establish a research basis that supports the urgency for change and the need to redesign successful small high schools as they strive to integrate 21st century skills, increase student achievement by making curriculum more relevant to student interests and long-term goals, and enhance

administrators' and teachers' understanding of how to create a school environment that positively supports students' perceptions of school. In this study, quantitative data collected in a survey provided a basis for qualitative administrative focus group discussions that will become components in a redesign plan for a small high school. Primarily, this study will offer recommendations for the redesign of a small high school. The ultimate purpose of this study will be to share these recommendations with demographically similar small high schools.

Possible future uses of this study include using the collected quantitative and qualitative data to generate professional development planning that focuses faculty attention on instructional practices and curriculum differentiation. In addition, in the future, sharing the findings generated from this study may serve to strengthen home-to-school communication and community connections.

Limitations

This study is limited to a small high school, with a student body of 434 students in Grades 9 through 12, in the

September through June 2006-2007 academic year. The small high school that is the focus of this study is located in Westchester County, New York. This suburban high school serves a school district in which the average mean per capita personal income is $86,702. In school districts in the immediate vicinity, also located in Westchester County, New York, the mean per capita personal income is $58,592. The location of the high school included in this study places it in the second most affluent county in New York State (New York State Data Center, 2005).

Another limitation of this study rests with the possible response of teachers' unions to altered workday or alternative schedules that extend beyond a traditional school day or year, the use of virtual classrooms with off-site teachers, online programs with off-site tutors, and the use of teaching assistants as student facilitators in virtual and online learning courses. Transportation challenges or tuition charges that may result from student participation in off-site community and college programs are another possible limiting factor.

Delimitations

The participants of this study are students in a small high school whose parents provided permission for them to participate in responding to the High School Student Engagement Survey (HSSSE, 2007) and who voluntarily elected to do so. Furthermore, delimitations include the participation of district administrators at this high school who are responsible for the redesign of the high school. Those administrators include the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, assistant superintendent for finance, director of guidance services, director or special services, middle school principal, and two elementary school principals.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to define the principal terms used within it.

Academic activities: For the purpose of this study, an academic activity refers to teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms as opposed to extracurricular activities which take place outside of school time.

Differentiated instruction: In this study, differentiated instruction means pedagogy used in classrooms and in the curricula for implementing varied teaching strategies. Differentiated strategies are designed to engage students with differing ability levels, varied levels of prior knowledge, and a spectrum of affinities toward ways of thinking as described by Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (1993). Those ways of thinking include logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, musical/rhythmic, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and visual/spatial.

School competence: For the purpose of this study, the definition of school competence refers to students' perceptions of the impact of social and environmental factors on their ability to control outcomes in learning activities (Bandura, 1986).

School engagement: For the purpose of this study, school engagement encompasses affective states during learning activities (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), participatory behaviors and identification, or a sense of belonging in a school setting (Finn, 1998).

Self-regulation: For the purpose of this study, individual students' self-regulatory behaviors are those

behaviors over which students believe they may exercise control (Zimmerman, 1995).

Small high school: For the purpose of this study, a small high school includes schools with 500 or fewer students (The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2002; Cotton, 1996; Williams, 1990).

Social-cognitive theory: For the purpose of this study, social cognitive theory will used to define the degree to which an individual exercises a combination of self-regulatory, self-reflective and cognitive (mental) functions to determine the degree of competence he or she feels in a social situation (Bandura, 1995).

Successful small high school: For the purpose of this study, the seven criteria critical to school success include a strong vision for school improvement, leadership, high academic standards, standards of the heart (positive school climate), family, and school and community partnerships. Additional factors that are indicators of success in small high schools include professional development, evidence of success established through standardized tests, school-based assessment measures, and the percentage of students who graduate and seek post-

secondary educational opportunities (The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001).

Twenty-first century skills: For the purpose of this study, 21st century skills refer to those defined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005) such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness, and social responsibility.

A Small High School: A Model for this Study

In response to calls for high school reform that address changes in global competitiveness and increased demands on the American workforce (Friedman, 2005) this study will focus on the creation and implementation of a redesign plan in a small high school, with a student population of 434, located in Westchester County, New York. This high school's administrators have articulated a need for the development of a systemic school redesign plan. The purpose of a redesign plan would be to prepare students for the anticipated needs of a global economy that will require American workers to be able to develop innovative

approaches to solving real world problems, apply technological skills, interpersonal skills, and multi cultural understanding in order to be competitive in a global marketplace (Friedman, 2005). These administrators want to offer advanced opportunities in science and mathematics, to include distance learning in virtual classrooms, to offer advanced level and career-based community programs, academic year foreign study programs, and independent project-based opportunities that go beyond traditional curriculum delivery and scheduling structures.

The formulation of redesign plans at this small high school and the necessity for change serves this school's overall mission to provide academic and extracurricular opportunities that will prepare students for post secondary education and, ultimately, the global marketplace. In addition, as a small high school with under 500 students, administrators have described the school's curricular structure as having the community support and flexibility to integrate innovative programs that model a direction for the future of secondary education that may be replicated in other small high schools.

Administrators of the small high school included in this study have articulated these objectives in light of

global change, awareness of ambitious educational goals set by schools in emerging powers such as India and China (Friedman, 2005), and concerns about what kinds of school structures will be required to help American high school students meet global economic competition. In the summer of 2005, these administrators read Thomas L. Friedman's, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century* (2005), as a basis for a group planning meeting. Because of reading Friedman's book, administrators agreed that new district goals for secondary education must include a strong academic foundation and an emphasis on how to prepare students for their futures (Friedman, 2005). Further, these administrators included an emphasis on future preparedness as an important purpose in this high school's mission. In addition to traditional achievement goals, administrators articulated the need for the development of programs that increase individualized opportunities, offer specialized coursework for advanced students, and access to online instruction and content discipline learning not currently offered in this high school. In addition, administrators discussed plans for increasing project-based curriculum, independent project opportunities, and opportunities for students to access real world experiences.

The principal of this small high school has articulated a need for a plan that includes structural changes in facility use, faculty assignments, class schedules, and curriculum. In addition, the principal cited a growing population of students and increased requests from parents and students for opportunities that extend beyond advanced placement (AP) courses. These requests, from both students and parents, are important factors in the development of this high school's redesign plans. Thus far, the principal has articulated a vision for this high school, which includes the expansion of its Science Research Opportunity and Independent Learner programs. The Science Research Opportunity is a four-year program that allows students in grades 9 through 12 to develop research projects, guided by professional researchers, in preparation for state-level, national and international science competitions. The Independent Learner Program is a four-year program that provides opportunities for students to pursue advanced-level projects in the arts and humanities. In addition, the principal has responded to the needs of advanced mathematics students with the implementation of an online pilot program in calculus c, in collaboration with Education Programs for Gifted Youth

(EPGY) at Stanford University that began in the fall of 2006. The principal has expressed the belief that these programs will be models in the development of redesign plans.

This small high school's district-level administrators have already demonstrated an interest in the use of student reports on educational engagement. Each year, the superintendent has personally conducted exit interviews with all graduating seniors. The superintendent and assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal have articulated an interest in the expansion and formalization of the process by which they collect qualitative anecdotal data from students with the express purpose of utilizing student reports on school engagement to support school improvement efforts. To this end, the superintendent and assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal plan to administer the High School Student Engagement Survey (HSSSE, 2007) to collect information from students about their attitudes toward school and their use of extracurricular time.

This high school's administrators have also articulated a desire to share redesign plans created and implemented in this school with other district

superintendents and high school principals as they, too, seek to develop policies, programs, and educational models that go beyond AP classes and test scores and serve the interests of current students as future workers in the 21st century. These administrators believe that applied knowledge of student engagement and redesign plans, developed in the high school included in this study, will be of value to other small high schools in their efforts to develop effective programs.

21st Century Skills and the Need for Change

The inclusion of student engagement data as a component of a strategic redesign plan is aligned with current policy initiatives that call for all high schools to assertively integrate 21st century skills into curricula. These skills include creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness, and social responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005) as a step toward the goal of preparing American students to become global workers. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills suggested that even if American high school students

succeed on traditional measures, standardized tests and AP classes, such measures continue to leave high school students woefully unprepared (Honey, Fasca, Gersick, Mandinach, & Sinha, 2005, p. 19) for success as 21st century workers. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills recommended that schools integrate curricula with real world learning opportunities that target creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness, and social responsibility. In addition, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills suggested that the integration of the aforementioned skills will influence the delivery of curriculum at the secondary level, toward the inclusion of student-generated independent projects and online education that focuses on student interests and real world problems. The United States Department of Education (U.S.DOE) has echoed the call for 21st century competency in the *American Competitiveness Initiative* that emphasizes that high schools have been stagnant for over 30 years. According to the U.S.DOE, American educators need to invest in teaching 21st century skills at the secondary level because "approximately 90% of the fastest-growing jobs will require some postsecondary education" (U.S.DOE, 2006, p.4). As with

the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the U.S.DOE's initiative outlined what improvements are necessary to increase student achievement; however, it is up to individual districts to redesign or restructure schools tomeet improvement objectives.

Appropriateness of a Small High School for this Study

Research on school size generally focuses on two factors: (a) how schools optimize student learning and development and (b) the degree to which school size impacts student achievement (Wasley, 2002). Cotton's research (1996) on school size supported findings by Williams (1990) that identifieed small secondary schools as being those that serve between 400 and 800 students. In the literature on school size, the optimum size of a small school has not been conclusively established (Cotton, 1996).

Wasley (2002) stated that small school effectiveness is based on the shared philosophical beliefs amongst district leaders that all students can learn if given personal attention and flexibility in the areas of curriculum and scheduling, and if program models that facilitate student

engagement and achievement is implemented. The Small Schools Project (2005), funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2002), reported that additional factors in the success of small schools include districts' autonomy to make important school policy decisions and engage in multiple forms of assessment to guide school improvement initiatives. Cotton (1996) identified proponents of small schools and generally accepted findings of such schools. These findings included the identification of factors that indicate that academic achievement in small schools is equal to or better than in larger schools. The factors identified as features of small schools' success in supporting student achievement include generating positive student attitudes toward academics and school in general, increasing the consistency of student attendance, and decreases in negative social behaviors such as truancy, discipline problems, violence, theft, substance abuse, and gang participation. Small high schools also reported decreases in drop-out rates, increased opportunities for faculty and students to develop personal relationships, higher rates of parental involvement, more positive attitudes between teachers and administrators, and

increases in students' self-efficacy as learners. In addition, small high schools reported that students take more responsibility for their own learning, and grouping instructional strategies and performance assessments associated with higher student achievement are more often implemented (Cotton, 1996). Cotton supported Barker and Gump's (1964) initial study on school size, which proposed that although larger schools were impressive, small schools provided benefits to students, teachers, and administrators in the form of personal relationships and a better quality curriculum. Furthermore, Cotton corroborated Barker and Gump's findings that demonstrated that school morale and opportunities for students to participate in a wide variety of extracurricular activities were greater in smaller settings. Cotton has demonstrated that in comparative studies students in small and large high schools do not differ on college-related variables such as entrance examination scores, acceptance rates, attendance, grade point average, and high school graduation. Cotton asserted that these variables link more closely to socio economic factors than school size.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2002) linked small high schools to positive academic student outcomes, improved test scores, increases in college acceptances and post secondary employment. Further, students in small high schools reported having a greater sense of belonging in school and increased academic and extracurricular engagement that correlates to reductions in dropout rates and higher student achievement (Finn, 1998).

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)

Data were collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) in a small high school. Since the inaugural administration of the HSSSE in 2004, over 180,000 students in 87 schools in 19 states have participated in this survey. According to reports published by the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2006) school administrators have used the results of the HSSSE (2006) to "alter school practices and enhance student learning" (p. 13). Further, specific school information is helpful in identifying curricular and instructional weaknesses. The development of strategies that promote programs and

benefits for students and consider the demands on teachers may be a direct result of having an HSSSE (2006) database. Schools that have participated in the HSSSE (2006) have also reported changes in the development of extracurricular programming, strategies for increasing community involvement, the addition of programs to increase student study time, and encouraging students to read more. These kinds of changes are important to student achievement and students' ultimate success. The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) will provide the information that achievement tests do not measure and that is necessary to gain insight into the experiences of high school students. Furthermore, student engagement data can "help to identify where changes are needed to enhance student learning and school effectiveness" (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2005, p. 14).

Student Engagement and Student Voice

Traditionally, "Students, who are at the center of the high school experience, are often at the periphery of discussions regarding changing their schools" (Shannon &

Blysma, 2006, p. 28). To be effective, schools need to gather data on student engagement and include students in a dialogue about how to best develop relevant programs that respond to an individual student's unique talents and interests. Organizational structures that enhance meaningful relationships between students, teachers, and school practices may also "provide a key to improving student learning" (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2001, p. 3). At a time when there is much discussion about a stalemate in secondary school reform, activating student voice (Mitra, 2004)to engage students and teachers in a process in which they "co-create the path of reform" (p. 654) may serve to enhance students' developmental growth and increase their personal investment in their educational journey now and in the future.

Theoretical Frameworks

Research interest in the cognitive and affective components of learning and the impact of learning environments on students have been prevalent throughout the

20th century and continue today. B. F. Skinner (1938) and Jean Piaget (1936, 1971) as well as constructivist theorists John Dewey (1938), Lev Vygotsky (1962), and Jerome Bruner (1962) greatly impacted early development of theories on student engagement.

Jeremy D. Finn's (1989) taxonomy of student engagement focused on participatory behaviors that positively affect student achievement. Finn found a positive relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities, which foster a sense of belonging, and school achievement (Finn, 1989). Finn (1998) broadened the scope of his definition and stated that, "A primary objective of instructional practice should focus on student engagement" (Finn, 1998, p. 1). Finn (1998) posited that the salient in-school behavioral components of student engagement are participating in class, following school rules, being on time for classes, paying attention to the teacher and responding to teacher-initiated directions and questions. Further, he asserted that the affective components of in-school engagement include a student's feeling of belonging at school, valuing the outcomes of an education, and a desire to seek a post secondary education. Skinner and

Belmont (1993) also presented a behavioral theory of student engagement that included the learners' intrinsically motivated actions and affective state during learning activities (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Finn (1989, 1998) and Skinner and Belmont (1993) all integrated intrinsic and extrinsic behaviors as interdependent mechanisms that motivate or suppress student effort.

Social-cognitive theorists Bandura (1986, 1995), Schunk and Zimmerman (1994), and Dweck (1999) have explored the relationship between a student's affective disposition and learning outcomes. Social-cognitive theorists also found a relationship between how an individual student may or may not report positive school engagement and the degree to which an individual's perception of his or her competence toward achieving a goal is mediated through self-regulatory mechanisms (Zimmerman, 1989). Further, social-cognitive theory suggested that whether a goal is learning-oriented (internal) or task-oriented (external) and the degree to which a student feels intrinsically satisfied or dissatisfied or seeks external validation for demonstrations of competency may play a part in the degree

to which a student may demonstrate school engagement (Elliot & Dweck, 1988).

Theoretical frameworks on student engagement also included the manner in which structures and relationships that support social/emotional growth serve to reinforce achievement goals (Stipek, 2004). Goal orientation as a motivational factor in school engagement reinforces successful student-centered learning patterns and practices that, if established in high school, may remain evident in post-secondary educational and workplace experiences (Shannon & Blysma, 2006).

Student Engagement and High School Reform

Historically, high school reform efforts have largely focused on what adults decide is important for students to know and be able to do. Excluded from school reform discussions have been the issues of how relationships and trust between students and adults facilitate student engagement. Also absent from such discussion has been the development of social models that teach students how dialogues with adults about their educational experiences

foster an understanding of social roles and the importance of self-directed learning (Mitra, 2004). Roberto Joseph (2006) posited that students are important stakeholders in the school change process and for school change to be effective for students, "student-voice activities" must empower the development of the social skills that they will need when they enter the real world (p. 4). Nancy Stipek, Dean of Stanford University's Graduate School of Education and principal author and editor of *Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn* wrote, "We can require adolescents to attend school, but learning requires conscious and purposeful effort, which cannot be legislated" (Stipek, 2004, p. 4). Stipek further suggested that learning as a foundation of achievement must be predicated on effective practices that address "underlying psychological variables related to motivation, such as competence and control, beliefs about the value of education, and a sense of belonging" (p. 6).

Theodore R. Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer echoed the importance of students' active involvement in guiding their own educational outcomes and participation in structuring school experiences in their book, *The Students are*

Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract (1999). Sizer and Sizer hypothesized, "A community's functioning rests on trust, and trust comes from the understanding that emerges from dialogue" (p. 17), and that this trust emphasizes a mutual process based on communication between students and adults. These dialogues should center on what should happen in schools and how schools model the processes inherent in all viable, successful community organizations. Alison Cook-Sather pointed to students' trust in adult leadership and perceptions of educators as important factors in how student engagement fosters the development of both student self-efficacy and the development of supportive educational policies (Cook-Sather, 2002). Cook-Sather cited "a basic lack of trust in students" (p. 4) that has evolved in American high schools and continues to treat students as "recipients of what others determine is education," (p. 4) as a potentially mutable factors that deserve administrative attention (Cook-Sather, 2002).

The theoretical frameworks included in this study clearly pointed toward the central role that student engagement plays in student achievement and ultimately in what kinds of programs and opportunities schools offer. To keep pace

with cultural, social, and global changes, school engagement needs consideration as an important component of school culture so that the influence of media and technology on current and future high school students continues to make school time meaningful and relevant.

Overview of the Study

Chapter I introduced this study and the problem around which it centers: How might administrators utilize knowledge of student engagement to inform the direction of small high school redesign plans, support student achievement, and address the needs of American students who will need to be competitive in the 21st century global workforce?

Chapter II contains a review of the literature that focuses on the theories that underlie student engagement and an assessment of student engagement as a construct that supports the development of school improvement and redesign plans. Chapter III contains a description of both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies used in this study to assess student engagement and apply them in focus

groups with superintendents, a high school principal, and administrative department heads. Chapter IV will include an analysis of the data collected. Chapter V will summarize this study and offer conclusions, recommendations for a small high school redesign plan, and potential directions for future research.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings in literature related to student engagement, teaching, and learning. This chapter is comprised of two sections. First, this chapter includes an historical overview on the background and context of constructivist education that provides a foundation for the study of student engagement. Second, this chapter presents a research background on behavioral theory and student outcomes that underlie the study and application of information about student engagement.

Background and Context

The theoretical constructs that underlie student engagement stem from the emergence of interest in the dual development of cognitive and behavioral learning processes within the individual. Early educational constructivists and behavioral psychologists including Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, Skinner and Bruner shifted the direction in

thinking about how learning takes place from a teacher-driven construct to one that places the focus on the learner.

Piaget's (1896-1980) work on understanding the development of knowledge was based on his scientific interest in biological adaptations and the interpretation of information which manifests itself as thought (Piaget, 1971). Piaget was one of the first scientists to apply methodical conceptual frameworks to the psychological processes by which individuals invent ideas. Although influenced by revolutionary developments in the field of physics (Einstein was his contemporary), Piaget identified himself first as a biologist and, as such, applied concepts of adaptation to the study of cognition. The basis of his theoretical approach to understanding learning was from a perspective in which an organism became viable because it adapted, or fit, into its environment.

Thus, Piaget (1971) was able to align his theories on cognition with scientific thinking in the fields of physics and biology. Piaget posited that adaptive cognition existed on two primary levels based on practical survival. A third level of adaptive cognition existed within humans'

abilities to abstract ideas and the capacity to reflect upon them. Piaget further theorized that some knowledge requires social interaction and other types of knowledge do not. With that construct, he attempted to explain how young children organize immediate sensory-motor experiences, integrate and respond to internal symbolic (imaginative) experiences simultaneously.

While Piaget's (1971) constructivism was based on the psychological development of children and the manner in which they actively compare, create, discover and construct meaning, and then discard incorrect ideas about the world through a step-by-step process, Dewey (1859-1952) theorized that learners draw knowledge from experiences that are meaningful to them. Further, Dewey postulated that learning takes place in a social context, such as a classroom, in which communities of learners construct knowledge together. Dewey suggested that participation in concrete activities stimulates and encourages the application of concepts that the learner is trying to grasp (Dewey, 1938).

In contrast to Dewey's student-centered approach, Vygotsky (1896-1934), a pioneer of social constructivism,

developed a complex theory of education that included the cultural context in which a learner is embedded and cognitive growth as a product of activities practiced in the social and cultural environment in which an individual grows up. Interaction within the social/cultural context then, becomes a catalyst for the development of higher order conceptual thinking (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky suggested that lower order thinking (focused on practical issues), which differentiated from higher mental functions, developed through social and cultural mediation and was a product of genetics. Vygotsky's most recognized contribution to educational theory was his concept of the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the difference between a child's capacity to solve problems on his or her own and his or her capacity to solve problems with assistance. Teaching and curriculum, suggested Vygotsky, must integrate the zone of proximal development and differentiate between a current developmental level and what a child may find possible to accomplish over time. The mediating factor in this approach is the socializing influence and intervention of the

teacher who assists the child in reaching his or her full cognitive potential (Vygotsky, 1962).

Skinner's (1938) landmark publication, *The Behavior of Organisms: An Experimental Analysis*, was based on experiments with male white rats and the manner in which, through negative (punishments), positive (rewards) and conditioned (repetitive) reinforcements, he was able to shape and predict their behavior. Thus, Skinner established that behavior, viewed as scientific data, placed the study of psychology as a natural science in the same class as biology, chemistry and physics (Bissell, 2001). Skinner demonstrated that environmental manipulations could predict and control behavior. These findings were relevant to educators and psychologists who were simultaneously investigating the roles of motivation, personal volition, and the impact of classroom environments and school practices on learners.

While Skinner (1938) believed in the genetic and manipulated, repetitive responses to learning, Bruner (1966, 1996), a major proponent of constructivist theory, proposed that new conceptual understandings rest upon current or past knowledge and that learning is an active,

social process. Bruner conceived that cognitive structures (schema and mental models) provided meaning and that organizational constructs allowed individuals to extend their understanding beyond what they already knew. Bruner's (1966) early theory of instruction included four major aspects. First, the learner's predisposition toward learning is of importance. Second, Bruner suggested that to understand complex bodies of knowledge, learners need to understand component parts. Third, he proposed that curriculum construction must utilize effective sequences in which instructors have considered pacing. Fourth, the utilization of rewards and punishments affect learners and should promote learning (Bruner, 1966). Bruner's later work expanded his theory to include the social and cultural aspects of learning (Bruner, 1986, 1996). The principles that defined Bruner's work include an emphasis on instruction that is concerned with experiences and contexts that make a student willing and able to learn (readiness). Bruner recommended that concepts should spiral so that each level of instruction provides a foundation for the next level of advancement (scaffolding). Furthermore, instruction should encourage conceptual thinking that

inspires learners to explore ideas beyond the information given (Bruner, 1996).

Therefore, the theoretical constructs that underlie student engagement stem from the emergence of interest in the dual development of cognitive and behavioral learning. Cognitive and behavioral learning refers to the processes by which individuals construct their own learning. While Dewey (1938) theorized that communities of learners construct knowledge from contexts that are meaningful to them, Vygotsky (1962) pioneered social constructivism, a complex theory of education that included the learner's cultural context and cognitive growth as a product of activities practiced in social environments. Influenced by Dewey and Vygotsky, the work of Piaget (1971) initiated a shift in thinking about how learning takes place from a teacher-driven construct to one that places focus on the learner. Skinner (1938) demonstrated that environmental manipulations could predict and control behavior. Bruner (1966), a major proponent of constructivist theory, proposed that learning is an active, social process in which current or past knowledge builds new conceptual understandings.

As educational theorists, Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, Skinner and Bruner have provided important insights into the cognitive, behavioral and organizational constructs that underlie how individuals extend their knowledge and engage in active learning. To educators and psychologists who are simultaneously investigating the roles of motivation, personal volition, and the impact of classroom environments and school practices on learners, their findings continue to be relevant and, as such, form a philosophical basis (construct) for the present investigation.

Behavioral Theory and Student Engagement

Investigations into the broad theoretical, constructivist foundations presented by Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, Skinner, and Bruner continue as social psychologists explore behavioral theories that are applicable to the social and affective contexts of learning. Those theorists include Albert Bandura, a principal proponent of social-cognitive theory, Barry J. Zimmerman and Dale H. Schunk, who are researchers in the

area of self-regulation and learning, and Carol Dweck, who is best known for her work on self-theories on how self-efficacy and competency beliefs impact individuals' learning outcomes.

Bandura, a pioneer of social-cognitive theory, is a behaviorist who theoretically differentiates himself from Skinner's (1938) environmental reinforcement model by focusing on cognition as central to the motivational factors and self-regulatory mechanisms that contribute to human behavior. Central precepts of social-cognitive theory include the manner in which individuals acquire behavior through the observation of others and the degree to which individuals feel they are able to control or forestall outcomes. Bandura made a distinction between what people believe to be true and what "objectively is the case" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Bandura speculated that the development of self-efficacy must bridge the gap between subjective and objective self-views through four types of experiences. First, mastery reinforces self-efficacy through experiences in which an individual acquires the cognitive, behavioral, and self-regulatory skills necessary to succeed in a given situation. Second, self-efficacy is

strengthened through vicarious experiences and modeling in which an individual identifies with others, like him or herself, who have successfully exerted effort and persistence to achieve desired outcomes. Third, social persuasion builds efficacy through realistic encouragement and the external reinforcement that competency is attainable. Finally, physiological and emotional states, such as anxiety, play a role in building self-efficacy. Self-regulation plays a role in how an individual interprets the meaning of heightened anxiety and that the ability to control anxiety motivates or detracts from the attainment of desired outcomes (Bandura, 1995). Bandura hypothesized that the interplay of cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective responses interact to mediate internal and behavioral responses to stress.

Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) continued to explore the application of social-cognitive theory to educational settings. As social-cognitive theorists, they emphasized how students seek social models and gain assistance with learning tasks as coupled with their ability to self-monitor the effectiveness of selected learning strategies. In contrast, constructivist theorists who emphasized

students' active participation in learning tasks as a way to build meaning, continued to promote strategies that include self-regulatory practices such as length of effort, self-expressed confidence, and persistence in problem-solving (Zimmerman, 1995). The motivation of choice, characterized by learners' self-selecting their learning opportunities, is a third aspect to self-regulation in learning. Two examples of choice included the opportunity to select an alternative activity of interest or to select a preferred learning strategy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Research results indicated that students can improve their performance through the direct teaching of self-regulatory behaviors and can overcome both "personal and environmental obstacles to their academic success" (Schunck & Zimmerman, 1994, p. 19).

Bandura (1977) included teachers as important contributors to student engagement and learning outcomes. He theorized that the degree to which a teacher exerts effort or demonstrates persistence in making academic choices is dependent upon the degree of self-efficacy that the teacher feels with regard to the level of task difficulty demanded by the curriculum. Bandura (1995)

reasoned that teachers' beliefs in personal efficacy "affect their general orientation toward the educational process" (p. 20) Further, he posited that the style a teacher chooses to direct toward students, either with extrinsic rewards and sanctions for negative behaviors or support for students' interests and self-directedness, are strong predictors of students' academic achievement. This theoretical perspective emerged from an integration model in which Bandura (1995) stated that self-efficacy, or the degree to which individuals feel that they have the control to necessary to mediate learning situations is dynamically integrated into the interactions between students and teachers and demonstrated in learning outcomes that result from these interpersonal interactions.

Dweck, also a social-cognitive theorist, has investigated the role of students' theories about themselves as learners in determining degrees of school engagement and achievement. Dweck described students as holding an *entity* learning theory if they believed that they had a predetermined and limited capacity for learning, and holding an *incremental* learning theory if, through effort and personal volition, they believed that their

capacity to learn could be extended (Dweck, 1999). The implication is that students who are entity theorists and believe they have a limited capacity to learn may be less engaged classroom learners than incremental theorists who believe that classroom engagement will increase their capacity to learn. Further, Dweck suggested that self-theories about learning capacity transcend ability levels. For example, students labeled gifted and who possess an entity self-theory may exhibit self-limiting learning behaviors. Dweck's experiments on such students demonstrate that, for example, failure to attain a desired grade may encourage a belief that he or she has hit the ceiling on their intelligence level with a resulting retraction from learning engagement.

Social-cognitive theorists also found a relationship between how an individual student may or may not report positive school engagement and the degree of mediation that an individual perceives between his or her competence toward achieving a goal and self-regulatory mechanisms (Zimmerman, 1989). Furthermore, social-cognitive theory suggested that whether a goal is learning-oriented (internal) or task-oriented (external) and the degree to

which a student feels intrinsically satisfied or dissatisfied or seeks external validation for demonstrations of competency may play a part in the degree to which a student may demonstrate school engagement(Elliot & Dweck, 1988).

Social psychologists Bandura, Zimmerman, and Schunk and Dweck have continued to build upon the constructivist foundation presented by Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, Skinner, and Bruner through the investigation of social-cognitive theories that apply behavioral models to the social and affective contexts of learning. As social psychologists, Bandura, Zimmerman, Schunk and Dweck, have focused their research on cognition as central to the motivational factors and self-regulatory mechanisms that contribute to the degree to which individuals feel that they are able to control their own behavior.

This overview described a variety of perspectives on underlying psychological mechanisms that may influence student engagement. Further, when considered together, the theorists mentioned in this review represent a body of work that points toward the complexity inherent in attempting to understand students' experiences as learners within the

social context of school. Theoretical frameworks on student engagement also included the manner in which structures and relationships that support social/emotional growth serve to reinforce achievement goals (Stipek, 2004). Goal orientation, as a motivational factor in school engagement, reinforces successful student-centered learning patterns and practices that, if established in high school, may carry forward in post-secondary educational and workplace experiences (Shannon & Blysma, 2006).

The literature reviewed herein has suggested that when students have the opportunity to exercise self-regulated behaviors based on positive self-efficacy beliefs, they are more likely to develop competency, describe themselves as engaged learners, and "assume responsibility for their academic achievement" (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 226). Student reports about their perceptions, attitudes as learners, and perceptions of teacher efficacy and school climate are, therefore, salient factors in the assessment of overall school effectiveness (Bandura, 1995).

Chapter III will discuss the methodology designed for use in collecting quantitative data, through the administration of the High School Survey of Student

Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), and qualitative data, collected in focus group discussions with school administrators, as components in the development of a redesign plan for the small high school that is the focus of this study.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

Overview

This chapter describes the overall research design and methodology including quantitative and qualitative data collection, population sampling, instrumentation, and analysis methods employed in this study. The research design of this study utilized qualitative data supported by quantitative data. Qualitative data, collected in focus group discussions that I facilitated, utilized quantitative data collected from high school students in Grades 9 through 12 following the administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) as a stimulus for discussions. The focus group discussions were an important component in the development of a redesign plan for a small high school in Westchester County, New York. The purpose of studying student engagement and student perceptions of program effectiveness as a basis for the redesign of a small high school was to utilize data on student engagement to raise high school students'

achievement through programs that enhance 21st century school relevance and increase individualized opportunities.

This study focused on three questions:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?
2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?
3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of redesigned school programs that help students gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness, and social responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006).

Methodology

As has been stated, this investigation utilized quantitative data and qualitative methods to achieve an unbiased result. To this end, discussions began with a review of the quantitative measures, followed by a discussion of the qualitative method. Also reported was the interaction of these methods. I used quantitative data

gleaned from the administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). The survey data collected was an important component in focus group discussions on the redesign of a small high school. The small high school that is the focus of this study served a population of 434 students during the 2006-2007 academic year. The focus group discussions, which comprised the qualitative portion of this study, included this small high school's superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, assistant superintendent for finance, director of guidance, director of athletics, and middle school principal. The purpose of the focus group meetings was to discuss the quantitative findings that have resulted from the administration of the High School Survey on Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and to use that data as components in plans for the redesign of a small high school.

Quantitative Research

The qualitative data collected in focus groups were linked to and built upon quantitative data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

During March 2007, the assistant superintendent for curriculum/principal of the small high school that is the focus of this study sent an informative letter to all high school students' parents that requested permission for their children's voluntary participation in completing the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). The high school that was the focus of this study received HSSSE (2007) materials including pre packaged surveys that were in envelopes of 30 each and instructions for survey administration and completion from the Center for Education and Policy Evaluation in Bloomington, Indiana. Surveys carried markers with a school identification and grade-level code. All high school 9th through 12th social studies teachers received a survey packet from the high school guidance department in April 2007 as well as instructions on the administration of the survey. The high school social studies teachers administered the High School Survey on Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) in April, 2007. All students in the high school had permission to take the HSSSE (2007) survey did so during a designated class period (43 minutes) in the same week. Social studies teachers collected completed surveys, placed them in sealed envelopes to ensure confidentiality, and returned them to

the high school guidance office. On or about the third week of April 2007, the surveys were returned to the High School Survey of Student Engagement, University of Indiana, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, in Bloomington, Indiana, for analysis. The surveys, containing frequency and comparative data were returned from the Center for Evaluation & Policy in Bloomington, Indiana in August 2007. With the permission of the superintendent and assistant superintendent for curriculum I made a quantitative evaluation based on the frequency distributions in the data. I organized the data for presentation to two administrative focus groups.

Population

The small high school that was the focus of this study is located in Westchester County, New York. With a mean per capita income of $86,702 this district is the second most affluent county in New York State (New York State Data Center, 2005).

The small high school included in this study, which serves 434 students in grades 9 through 12, provided demographic data on student gender and ethnicity for the

academic year 2006-2007. In grade 9 there are 48 female students and 65 male students. In the 9th grade, five females and three males are Asian, two females and two males are African American, six females and seven males are Hispanic, and 35 females and 53 males are Caucasian. There are no other ethnicities represented in the 9th grade. In the 10th grade, there are 56 female and 61 male students. In the 10th grade, zero females and three males are Asian, two females and one male are African American, 11 females and 11 males are Hispanic, and 43 females and 46 males are Caucasian. There are no other ethnicities represented in the tenth grade. In the 11th grade, there are 46 female and 50 male students. In the 11th grade, three females and three males are Asian, two females and two males are African American, 10 females and seven males are Hispanic, and 31 females and 38 males are Caucasian. There are no other ethnicities represented in the 11th grade. In the 12th grade, there are 58 female and 50 male students. In the 12th grade, three females and zero males are Asian, two females and one male are African American, nine females and five males are Hispanic, and 44 females and 44 males are Caucasian. There are no other ethnicities represented in the 12th grade. In the small high school that is the focus

of this study, 11 students in grades 9 through 11 participated in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program.

Data analyzed from this study were comprised of the responses of the 434 possible student participants who attend this small high school and who have parental permission to complete the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) (see Appendix D), developed by educational researchers at the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy in Bloomington, Indiana has been completed by over 181,499 students in 110 schools in 26 states within the United States of America since its inaugural administration in 2004 (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2006). The purpose of the survey is to increase understanding of students' perceptions of their school environment and out-of-school lives. According to the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy in Bloomington, Indiana, data collected on the HSSSE (2006) has been useful for school administrators,

faculty, parents, and community members as a tool to analyze directions for school improvement. Through comparing student attitudes and performance a individual high schools with data on student engagement gleaned from the 181,499 high school students who have already completed the HSSSE (2006), schools have developed programs and policies that respond to the survey's findings.

Since the first administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) in 2004, the demographic spread of all HSSSE respondents has been similar to national data gleaned from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) in terms of school size, socio economic levels, and school district locations. Respondents from districts located in "urban fringe" (HSSSE, 2006) areas represented 37% of the total respondent population. Gender breakdowns for 2004, 2005 and 2006 (HSSSE, 2006) were similar with 49% male and 51% female respondents. In 2006, Caucasian students comprised 68% of respondents, African American students comprised 13%, Asian students comprised 5% of respondents, Latino students comprised 5%, Native American students comprised 1%, and multi racial students comprised 5% of respondents and 3% of students taking the HSSSE (2006) survey did not respond to

the questions on ethnic identification. Course grades were reported with 16% of students receiving mostly A s, 32% mostly A s and B s, 22% mostly B s and C s. Females were 13% more likely than males to report mostly A s or A s and B s. Latino (55%) and Asian (49%) students reported having the greatest number of homes in which English is not spoken. English was not spoken in the homes of 18% of White, African American, and Native American student respondents. The HSSSE (2007) asks students to report their instructional track as general/regular education or as honors/college preparation. When asked about their post secondary educational plans, 83% reported intentions to seek some form of post secondary education following high school graduation. Further categories of questions include how students spend their time in and out of classes with a particular emphasis on out of school time (Finn, 1993). Questions on the HSSSE (2007) make a distinction between time after school spent on recreational activities, such as watching television or playing video games, and school-sponsored activities, such as athletics, student government, publications, and involvement in the arts. The HSSSE (2007) also provides data on relationships between

students' choices for after school activities, their reported academic tracks, and racial demographics.

School engagement questions on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) includes both participatory and relationship variables. Class preparation, assignment completion, time on homework and time spent reading were most often correlated with positive attitudes such as pride in school work, valuing rewards at school, making an effort and high educational values. The HSSSE (2007) describes relationships between the school variables listed above and reported gender, educational track, and membership in racial groups. Questions on relationships between students and teachers include the frequency of discussing ideas with teachers, e-mail communication with teachers, feedback on assignments, and opportunities to ask teachers questions about work. The HSSSE (2007) relates this information to reports of frequency of teacher responses to students, racial demographics, and the educational value described as the degree to which a student believes their school places substantial emphasis on academic performance. In addition, students at the small high school that is the focus of this study who participate in HSSSE (2007) were asked whether adults care about them about them and support them at

school. HSSSE (2006) reports that there is, in the national sample of 181,499 students who have already completed the survey, a relationship between students' attitudes toward school and the degree to which students feel supported and respected by their teachers.

School engagement questions include items on the benefits of school assignments, the challenge of school assignments, opportunities for participation, classroom discussion, and small group activities. Students also report on the frequency of writing assignments beyond five pages in length. Further, students were asked to report on the frequency with which they discuss assignments with peers and others outside of class and the degree to which they feel that classroom assignments encourage outside conversations and collaboration.

The HSSSE (2007) includes questions about ethnic diversity and the quality of interactions students have with people from different ethnic groups. Students are asked to report on how often people with diverse religious backgrounds, gender orientations and political perspectives are included in classroom discussions or assignments. Further, students report on the value they feel their school places on encouraging contact among students from

different backgrounds and beliefs (HSSSE, 2007). The HSSSE (2007) asks respondents questions about how affected they are by school experiences, school environment, their sense of belonging, and the degree to which their school emphasizes community. Included, also are questions about fair treatment and school rules, how much students care about their school, whether they would select the same school again, and whether people at school, in an overall sense, accept them for who they are. Furthermore, students answer questions about the degree of safety that they feel at school.

Questions on the HSSSE (2007) ask about students' perceptions of how well their school contributes to their knowledge, skills, and personal development. Students were asked to report on the degree to which they feel their school has provided opportunities to teach them to write effectively, learn on their own, and work well with others. Additional questions include how well they are prepared for college, think deeply or critically, and use computers and information technology. Students report whether they feel they speak effectively, are encouraged to develop clear career goals, and hold personal values. Also included are questions about how well they have learned work-related

skills, understanding others from different backgrounds, understanding themselves, solving real-world problems, and how they contribute toward making their community a better place.

The HSSSE (2007) asked students whether they feel they have a voice in what they do at school. Questions include whether or not students feel they have a role in deciding what they study, choosing between different types of school experiences, and influencing classroom decisions. Finally, the HSSSE (2007) asks respondents to rate the degree of challenge to do their best work, and about their effort and the expectation of effort, they are required to put into schoolwork.

HSSSE (2006) results indicated that students who feel they have a voice at school are more likely to report positive relationships with teachers. Furthermore, students who feel that they have a voice at school are more likely to report that school learning is useful, that their school is safe, that they have exceeded their work expectations, that they take pride in their schoolwork, and that they place a high value on learning.

Qualitative Data Collection

Straus and Corbin (1990) posited that qualitative research investigations produce findings by means other than statistical methods. These alternative methods include collecting data on an individual's life experiences, behaviors, emotions, organizational functioning, socio cultural phenomena, and interpersonal interactions through observations and interviews (p. 5). Straus and Corbin included interviews, focus groups, and reports of personal views gleaned from practitioners as valid means by which to collect qualitative data. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) confirmed the validity of utilizing focus groups as a means to explore a general topic from multiple perspectives, learn about a range of views, encourage participants to expand upon their ideas and engage in reflective conversations (p. 101). Gay (1996) also suggested the use of focus groups that value participants sharing opinions in a setting that encourages the expression of ideas. Seidman (2006) suggested that interviews that center on the experiences of individuals whose work comprises the substance of what takes place in a given organization are a primary means by which researchers may garner data from

educational organizations. Furthermore, Seidman posited that interviews provide insight into an organization through eliciting meaning individuals derive from their work.

In this study, I collected qualitative data in focus groups. These focus groups consisted of seven district-wide administrators in the first focus group and two district administrators whose focus was specific to the development of middle and high school programs in the second focus group. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) posited that a limited group size is "particularly useful" (p. 101) to "stimulate talk from multiple perspectives from the group participants" (p. 101). Bogdan and Biklen further suggested that while participants may share and build upon one another's ideas, it is necessary for the researcher to maintain the group's focus on the purpose of the interview. For this reason, I have included Straus and Corbin's (1990) qualitative research focus group interview techniques. Interview techniques suggested by Straus and Corbin include posing structured research questions that are also open ended so as to invite a variety of responses, taking field notes, and requesting participants' permission to tape record focus group sessions. Seidman (2006) suggested

that follow-up questions clarify points that emerge in an interview and that these types of questions extend the purpose of structured questions to elucidate emerging issues and ideas offered by the interviewee(s).

Prior to the first meeting of the first focus group, the administrative focus group and I received data from the High School Survey on Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), copies of the research questions which are at the core of this study, and the interview guide questions which elucidate and expand upon the research questions. Researchers at the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana will have tabulated and analyzed the data. The purpose of the preview of the data was to encourage reflection on the part of the focus group participants and myself prior to the first of two group meetings. These group meetings maximized the potential for future discussions with teachers, parents, community members, and students once the administrative focus group began to shape plans for the redesign of the small high school.

Administrative Focus Group Composition

The internal sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) of school administrators who comprised the focus groups was referred by the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal on the basis of their historic and current insight into policies and issues relevant to secondary education and secondary school programs. Furthermore, the suggested focus group compositions included administrators who possess knowledge of the current curriculum at the high school on which this study is based. Further criteria utilized by the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal were that all focus group members have regular contact with the high school student body and sensitivity to this school's climate. Seidman (2006) postulated that a "major criterion for appropriateness" (p. 48) in choosing focus group participants is "whether the subject of the researcher's study is central to the participants' experience" (p. 48). In this study, the first focus group included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, the assistant superintendent for finance, the director of guidance services, the director of special services, the

middle school principal, the principal of a kindergarten through first grade elementary school, and the principal of a second through fourth grade elementary school. The second focus group included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal only. Both of these administrators participated in the first focus group discussion. All of these focus group participants have a direct impact on the development of programs for this small high school and are involved in a district-wide redesign and restructuring plan spearheaded by the board of education. Teachers', parents' and student voices' were included in redesign planning after the administrative focus group reflected on data and developed initial redesign plans.

Focus Group Meetings

Straus and Corbin (1998) acknowledged, "There always are constraints of time, energy, and availability of participants, and other conditions that affect data collection" (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 292). Based on the schedules of the focus group's administrators, I had determined that two focus group meetings provided the

"theoretical saturation" (p. 292) necessary to determine that "any new data would add, in a minor way, to the many variations of major patterns" (p. 292). I arranged contact visits with the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal to organize meeting logistics, determine the best times for meetings, the meeting venue and the dates on which the focus group met (Seidman, 2006).

The agenda for the two focus group meetings included the distribution of print copies of the research questions that are central to this study, distribution of print copies of the interview guide questions found in Appendix C, and distribution of print copies of the results of data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). With prior permission from all focus group members, and to ensure that all focus group members' voices are audible, a WS-100 Olympus digital voice recorder was tested, turned on, and placed on a side table.

I then asked the focus group members to review the research questions. The research questions were:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?

2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?
3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of redesigned school programs that help students gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness, and social responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006).

Based on these research questions and questions included in the interview question guide (Appendix C), the first focus group participants were asked for comments on their perceptions of the data collected from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). In the second focus group, members shared perceived relationships between the data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) and the strengths and weaknesses in current curricular and extracurricular programs in this small high school. In both focus groups, I guided the discussion based on the research questions and interview guide questions (Appendix C) as well as included prompts to clarify and expand upon individuals' responses and ensure that all focus group participants have an opportunity to share their ideas. Focus group discussions, scheduled for

one hour each, did not allow additional time to extend meeting discussions.

Focus Group Interview Questions

In this study, a focus group comprised of school administrators responded to interview questions that I supplied as the basis for a discussion on student engagement and the development of school redesign plans. These questions included both the primary research questions, previously provided in this chapter, and those in the interview question guide which are included in Appendix C.

Administrative focus group discussions, based on data collected through the administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), utilized quantitative findings from this survey as a basis for generating plans to redesign the small high school upon which this study is based. Straus and Corbin (1990) suggested that the interview guide developed for use in focus group discussions should purposefully reflect the meaning of the issues addressed through structured and pre determined research questions as well as available

supporting data. In this study, the discussion centered on the previously stated research questions that explored the meaning of student responses to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and how those responses may influence the development of a redesign plan for a small high school.

I also included spontaneous and open-ended questions designed to investigate the meaning of participant responses (Straus & Corbin, 1998). These spontaneous and open-ended questions were included as issues arose directly from the focus group discussions (Merriam, 1998) and served to clarify and expand upon individual focus group participants' responses. My spontaneous questions were those that checked on my understanding in the interview setting and provided opportunities for more "information, opinions, and feelings to be revealed" (Merriam, 1998, p. 78). In addition, spontaneous and open-ended questions based on focus group member's responses further explored the primary research questions already provided in this study. I also included spontaneous and open-ended questions about specific topics and data gleaned from the results of the High School Survey on Student Engagement (2006) based on focus group member's responses, insofar as

these questions clarify individual's perceptions of student engagement in academic classes, school climate, and student choices for use of after-school time.

Quint's (2006) research on high school reform models provided the basis for interview questions intended for use in the both the first and second focus group meeting. In this study, the questions intended for use in the first and second focus group meeting are included with the interview guide questions found in Appendix C. These questions concerned the use of the data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and the development of a school redesign plan. The focus group interviews included questions about personalized instruction, increased academic rigor, the provision of support for high-quality teachers and curriculum, as well as the development of targeted strategies to increase student achievement.

I used an interview guide (Appendix C) based on the primary research questions which comprised the foundation for this study as well as additional questions created for use in the focus group interviews (Merriam, 1998). Seidman (2006) supported the use of an interview guide and suggested that the researcher must avoid strict adherence

to it as pre structured questions may serve to inhibit the flow of relevant information from participants. For this reason, the focus group meetings included spontaneous and open-ended questions designed to investigate the meaning of participant responses (Straus & Corbin, 1998). Yin (2003) supported the use of an interview guide (see Appendix C) in situations in which the length of the interview is limited by time constraints, as is the case in this study. Yin further suggested that to follow and explore the intentions and meanings contained in participant responses open-ended questions should be used.

I made an audio digital recording of the focus group meetings with the permission of the focus group participants (Seidman, 2006). Audio recording the sessions provided benefits in terms of capturing a detailed record of the interviews, providing a means of accounting for data, and improving interview techniques. Fully transcribed texts of both focus group meetings, which I completed, are included as Appendix E. Seidman suggested the use of equipment that is not intrusive will do the least to affect self-editing on the part of the participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggested that audio recording interviews is useful if participants have granted permission to the

researcher to utilize recording equipment and if confidentiality is assured. Further, Bogdan and Biklen supported the important role that audio recording plays in improving a researcher's interview techniques and providing a reliable data source. Yin (2003) supported the use of audio recorders in interviews and suggested that the researcher be familiar with technological and logistical considerations in the use of equipment to minimize any self-consciousness on the part of participants due to being audio recorded.

I transcribed the focus group interviews and checked the transcriptions for accuracy. The purpose of these transcriptions was to capture the substance and meaning of interviewee responses without any alteration from what was meant or intended at the time of the interview (Seidman, 2006). Furthermore, transcriptions produced by the researcher provide the most reliable basis for establishing internal and external validity once a qualitative analysis of the interview and survey data is undertaken (Merriam, 1998).

The Role of the Researcher

"In a qualitative study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information" (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). As such, the researcher must be aware of how personal values, bias, and the nature of his/her relationship with interview participants, that either is pre existing or may be established at the point of interviewing participants, may affect the direction of questioning during the course of interviews. Further, in order to minimize personal bias and the possibility of influencing the focus and direction of interview questions, the researcher must be sensitive to his/her non verbal responses to respondent answers and to probing questions (1998). Yin (2003) suggested that the researcher exhibit the qualities of being a good listener, remain flexible in terms of following the course along which an interview develops, be good at asking and interpreting questions, be unbiased and as free as possible of preconceived notions, and possess an in-depth grasp of

the substantive issues to be investigated in the interview (p.57).

In this case, every effort was made to mitigate the possible effects of bias by using both quantitative data and an interview guide as a basis for focus group discussions. In addition, I hold a master's degree in guidance and counseling and I have extensive training and professional experience in conducting group interviews. I have a professional relationship with the interviewees. For this reason, the interviews began with small talk (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and progressed to focus on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) data, research questions, and questions included in the interview guide. Bogdan and Biklen emphasized the importance of the researcher establishing a comfortable rapport with interviewees as a basis for non biased facilitation.

Quantitative Data as a Basis for the Redesign of a Small High School

Part of the quantitative data, collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement national overview

(HSSSE, 2004) indicated that, "Almost half (48%)of the students had not discussed ideas from their readings or classes with a teacher outside of class during the school year" (p. 6). Furthermore, "About seven out of 10 respondents (71%) said that they had many opportunities to ask teachers questions about their work" (p. 6). If this holds true for the small high school that is the focus of this study, the administrative focus group may wish to utilize this data in discussions with teachers with the goal of developing strategies that encourage and extend opportunities for intellectual discourse. For example, in considering a redesign plan for a small high school, focus group administrators may decide to work with teachers to develop forums beyond the classroom in which students may share ideas about what they have learned in content classes in which there is inadequate time for discussion due to the demands of curriculum coverage and test preparation.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement national overview (2004) also provided data that indicated that, "a larger percentage of African American (35%) and Hispanic (31%) students reported that they never worked on projects with other students outside of class compared to Asian

(17%) and White (24%) students" (p. 7). If similar findings emerge from data collected on the HSSSE (2007) in the small high school that is the focus of this study, the administrative focus group may wish to identify the percentage of African American and Hispanic students who report never working on projects with other students and link this information to data on student achievement. Looking at the relationships between ethnicities and their responses to questions that indicate the degree to which they perceive that they fit in at their school and find school useful may then serve as a basis for working within the school to strengthen specific groups of students' social connections and provide opportunities to enhance multi cultural understanding amongst all students.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement national overview (2004) also reported that a part of their data reflects that "two thirds (66%) of the students said that at least one adult in their school cared about them and knew them well" (p. 6). If this holds true at the small high school that is the focus of this study, it would mean that one third (34%) of students, or approximately 144 individuals, did not report having contact with an adult at

school who they perceive cares about them and knows them well. This kind of information may be useful to the administrative focus group as a basis for developing a formal program (assigned advisors) or informal plan to work with both faculty and staff to ensure that all students have regular contact with a caring adult. Furthermore, this kind of data may be useful to the director of guidance in the development of plans to extend guidance services and work with school personnel to provide increased opportunities for students to develop relationships with adults at school.

In addition, part of the HSSSE (2004) national overview data demonstrated that "less than half (46%) of the special education students indicated that they feel safe at school" (p. 9). Should this hold true for the small high school that is the focus of this study, the administrative focus group may wish to share this information with special education teachers, school psychologists, and elementary school principals to further investigate the sources of concern for these students. As a basis for a redesign plan, this kind of information may

lead toward the introduction of a bullying prevention program or an evaluation of an existing program.

According to data reported in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2004) national overview there are connections between factors such as student perceptions of whether they are cared about and known by at least one adult at school and the degree to which students feel that they fit in at their school. For example, the HSSSE (2004) data reflected that students who report that they are cared about and known by an adult at school, and feel supported and respected by their teachers, are 41% more likely to feel that they fit into their school culture. Furthermore, students who feel cared about, supported, and respected are 55% more likely to report that they find what they learn at school useful. In addition, these students are 36% more likely to report that they work harder than they expected to work in school. These HSSSE (2004) findings also point toward students who feel cared about, supported and respected as being more involved in extracurricular activities at school and reporting a greater sense of efficacy in directing their academic outcomes.

The aforementioned examples represent only a few of the ways in which qualitative data gleaned from the administration of the High School Survey on Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) may serve as a basis for the data-driven qualitative research, to be conducted in the administrative focus group discussions, that is described herein.

In addition, High School Survey of Student Engagement's (HSSSE, 2007) results may be useful in school redesign plans at the small high school that is the focus of this study "to determine what is being done well and to identify areas where improvement is desirable" (HSSSE, 2004, p. 14). HSSSE (2006) data may be linked to other school data including attendance records, trends in the results of standardized tests, and the assessment of school improvement initiatives. Furthermore, the administrative focus group included in this study may use data gleaned from the HSSSE (2006) "to document and report effective educational practices and then share this information with others to promote student learning and improve school effectiveness" (HSSSE, 2004, p. 14). The administrative focus group may also choose to utilize HSSSE (2006) data

"to focus school resources on effective educational practices" (HSSSE, 2004, p. 14).

Overview

In this study, two focus groups comprised of administrators utilized data collected from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) as a basis for a discussion about the redesign of a small high school in Westchester County, New York. The administrative focus groups discussed how HSSSE (2007) data may lead toward the development of programs that increase student achievement, contribute toward professional development initiatives that make curriculum more relevant to student interests and long-term goals, as well as positively support students' perceptions of schoolwork and school climate. In addition, data collected from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) may serve to strengthen home-to-school communication.

I anticipated that an analysis of the data gleaned from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) will provide consensus around the urgency for change and

the need to develop and implement plans for change that will serve as a basis for a small high school redesign plan. Knowledge gathered from the HSSSE (2007) will assist administrators in working with teachers to create a school action plan. This action plan will focus on improvements in school climate, student learning, and performance through a shared dialogue with students about what is important for them to know and do while still in high school and in their futures beyond high school. HSSSE (2007) data may additionally provide a useful foundation for faculty discussions about instructional practices, classroom environment, and curriculum differentiation. Data collected from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) will provide a basis for discussions among administrators, teachers, parents, community members and students about what kinds of programs will provide the best directions for the future development of the small high school that is the focus of this study. Furthermore, data on student engagement and student achievement will be available to strengthen home, school, and community partnerships by providing parents and community stakeholders with information about the relationship between student

engagement, student achievement, and the development of school improvement plans.

Chapter IV

Presentation of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of school administrators based on their responses to quantitative data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). To this end, the study examined the relationship between administrators' perceptions of student engagement and the students' own perceptions of experiences inside and outside school. This study also explored links between quantitative data, gleaned from the HSSSE (2007), and plans for the redesign of high school programs.

This chapter includes the summarized qualitative and quantitative findings of the study. Quotations from two transcribed focus group discussions are included in these summaries. A full transcription of the two focus group discussions are included in Appendix C. Relevant quantitative data, derived from the High School Survey of

Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) are included in this chapter. These data correspond to administrators' responses where appropriate.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study answered the following research questions, based on qualitative and quantitative data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007):

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?
2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?
3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of school programs redesigned to help students gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness and social responsibility? (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005)

In this study, the qualitative data collected in two focus group discussions came from school administrators who work in a single school district in Westchester County, New York. To preserve confidentiality in the focus group discussions, participating administrators received tent cards that identified them by numbers as follows:

Member #1: Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum/ High School Principal

Member #2: Elementary Principal, Grades 2-4

Member #3: Director of Special Services

Member #4: Elementary Principal, Grades K-1

Member #5: Director of Guidance Services

Member #6: Superintendent, NOT PRESENT

Member #7: Director of Athletics, NOT PRESENT

Member #8: Principal, Middle School

Member #9: Assistant Superintendent for Finance

The focus group discussions, based on three research questions, related to an interview guide (see Appendix C) that included five interview questions per focus group meeting. Additionally, I utilized spontaneous questions in these interviews, based on the interview guide (Appendix C) to clarify the feelings and attitudes of administrators.

Both the first and second focus group discussions were one hour in duration. The interviews were audio taped on an Olympus WS-100 Digital Voice Recorder and were transcribed by me.

The first focus group included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, the assistant superintendent for finance, the director of guidance services, the director of special services, the principal of the middle school, an elementary school principal for grades kindergarten through first grade, and an elementary school principal for grades two through four. These administrators responded to the three research questions:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of administrators?
2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?
3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of school programs redesigned to help students gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-

direction, global awareness and social responsibility? (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005)

The administrators in the focus group also received a copy of the interview guide questions one through five designated for the first focus group meeting. Those questions were:

1. What kind of relationship do you see between students' perceptions of school engagement and administrators' perceptions of student engagement?
2. How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to individualize opportunities for all students?
3. What do students indicate that they do to learn out of school that may enhance how they learn while in school?
4. What are the most effective ways to share the data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with teachers?
5. What are the most effective ways to share data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with parents and community members?

The second focus group, which included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal, responded to the three research questions on the preceding page, and the interview guide

questions one through five designated for the second focus group meeting. Those questions were:

1. What kinds of programs might be developed based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Achievement (HSSSE, 2007)?
2. How might the school utilize data collected on the High School Survey of Student Achievement (HSSSE, 2007) to develop opportunities that enhance individualized learning?
3. How might academic rigor be increased based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)?
4. What kinds of programs might enhance student preparedness for the 21stcentury workplace based on the learning objectives outlined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005) including technological literacy, cultural literacy, global awareness and communication skills?
5. What do you see as the relationship between student engagement, perceived teacher support, and the development of curriculum that directly affect student achievement?

Administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)

The social studies teachers at the small high school that is the focus of this study administered the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), created by the University of Indiana's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, to students in Grades 9 through 12, in April 2007. A letter, sent from the assistant superintendent for curriculum/principal of the high school, asked all high school students' parents for permission for their children to participate in the HSSSE (2007) prior to its administration. Out of 434 students in the high school, only one parent requested that his child not participate. On April 20, 2007, social studies teachers administered the HSSSE (2007) during the regularly scheduled 43-minute class periods. Normal absences (16 students) and a weather-related change in scheduling, which influenced one class of 24 seniors, resulted in 393 students participating in the survey.

At the start of each class period, teachers read aloud the instructions included with the survey packets for filling out the survey and an explanation of the purpose of

the survey. Students were informed that the HSSSE (2007) was not a test and were told that clarifying questions were permissible at any point. Additionally, all the social studies teachers spoke spontaneously to students about the importance of the survey and encouraged integrity in answering the questions presented. The survey packet also included a sheet for teachers with questions about their experiences administering the survey and a request for any comments or reports on students' reactions to taking it. The survey, collected by the social studies teachers, and placed in envelopes provided by the University of Indiana's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, was returned to this institution for analysis.

The superintendent of the district, which is the focus of this study, agreed to share the results of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) with me for the purpose of examining the perceptions of district administrators and initiating a dialogue about the redesign of high school programs.

Presentation of Findings

First focus group meeting. The first focus group discussion took place in the central administrative office's conference room. I began the first focus group meeting with an introduction to the purpose of the discussion. Each participant was provided with a copy of the report of data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), and a copy of the interview guide. At the request of the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, an information sheet titled *Administrators' Meeting* (see Appendix B) was prepared the day before this meeting for distribution to participants. This information sheet provided an agenda and bulleted notes on the background of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

Additionally, six thematic areas that emerged from the survey data identified on the sheet assisted with the direction of this discussion. Those thematic areas included a) school climate; b) daily life activities (from the frequency of student breakfasts to how much time they spent on the telephone); c) extracurricular activities and homework; d) school engagement; e) classroom engagement;

and f) relationships with administrators, and teachers, staff and other students. Finally, the information sheet was used to stimulate dialogue through the presentation of one piece of cumulative data taken from the HSSSE 2007 frequency charts that illustrated each thematic area. A tent card, with a single number on it, assigned each administrator a numeric code to facilitate the interview and preserve confidentiality. Administrative roles and matching numeric codes are included in Appendix E.

In the first focus group, each individual administrator, referred to as a "member," received a number following this designation. Members responded to specific items on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). In the second focus group, numbers corresponding to administrators' previous designations appear in the transcribed text (Appendix E, Second Focus Group Meeting).

The first focus group meeting. Due to time constraints, the researcher pre-selected pages from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) report for review and response in this one hour discussion. The meeting began with my request that group members open the HSSSE (2007) to review frequency tables that

corresponded to survey questions on pages 13, 14, 15 and two items at the top of page 16. The questions and reported student responses on these pages concerned classroom assignments and corresponded with the themes classroom engagement and relationships with teachers and other students. Examples included how often students have attended classes without assignments prepared, the frequency with which they may have prepared papers of five or less pages, or five or more pages, whether teacher feedback had been helpful, and how often students had made presentations in classes. Also included were questions about how often students had conducted research outside of classes, worked with other students on projects, encountered class questions that had no clear answers, taken a test in class with essays or show-your-work problems created by teachers, connected concepts from one class to another, and completed teacher-made multiple-choice assessments. The administrators took 4 minutes to review these pages. Before the discussion began, I reviewed the research questions with participants and suggested that they review the interview guide questions.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?

Interview Guide Questions 1, 2 and 3 (see Appendix C)

1. What kind of relationship do you see between student perceptions of school engagement and administrators' perceptions of student engagement?

2. How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2005) to individualize opportunities for all students?

3. What do students indicate that they do to learn out of school that may enhance how they learn while in school?

I invited comments and perceptions from the group. The order of the responses to HSSSE (2007) questions therein corresponded to the order in which group members responded during this focus group discussion.

Table 1

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 13, Question 7e

Response	Frequency	Column %
Never	73	18.96
Rarely	127	32.99
Sometimes	118	30.65
Often	67	17.40
Total	385	100.00

Note. Question 7e was: How often have you: Prepared a draft of a paper or assignment before turning it in?

Member 3 began the discussion with the comment, "Prepared a draft, you would assume that. You know, we are constantly on the kids to do this. The percentage 32 or 33%. I was just… that was interesting." Member 1 responded: What we are looking at now through the 21st century skills, it is certainly obvious that those things are needed and that we are promoting that and that when you see it from the kids' perspectives, we are not doing as good a job as we need to.

Member 1 continued to speak, drawing attention to page 15, question 7o.

Table 2

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 15, Question 7o

Response	Frequency	Column %
Never	7	1.87
Rarely	25	6.67
Sometimes	107	28.53
Often	236	62.93
Total	375	100.00

Note. Question 7o was. How often have you: Taken a test with multiple-choice questions created by your teacher?

Member 1 responded:

I was disappointed at 7o, which indicates the high percentage of multiple-choice questions on a test because we are trying to move away from that. You know, it is the easier way for many teachers. And, you know they are still using the quicker easier way, and they are still doing that.

Member 1 continued to speak, drawing attention to page 15, question 7m.

Table 3

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 15, Question 7m

Response	Frequency	Column %
Never	29	7.65
Rarely	103	27.18
Sometimes	184	48.55
Often	63	16.62
Total	379	100.00

Note. Question 7m was: How often have you: Worked with other students on projects/assignments during or outside of class?

Member 1 responded:

I would like to see more of 7m, with more of the problem solving and creativity. I think that I see . . . my issue is that I find parents don't like that kind of instruction. We are meeting with a parent on Thursday who is really a linear thinker and wants everything very concrete and if there is no answer, and you give a "well it depends" kind of question the parents are crazed. So, some of it's that we have a lot of re-education to do as we deal with our strategic plan. Obviously, there are needs.

Member 2 continued the discussion drawing attention to page 13, question 7c, and page 13, question 7h.

Table 4

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 13, Question 7c

Response	Frequency	Column %
Never	14	3.61
Rarely	75	19.33
Sometimes	166	42.78
Often	133	34.28
Total	388	100.00

Note. Question 7c was: How often have you: Talked to your teacher about your class work?

Table 5

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 14, Question 7h

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Never	24	6.22
Rarely	68	17.62
Sometimes	194	50.26
Often	100	25.91
Total	386	100.00

7h. How often have you: Received helpful feedback from teachers on assignments or other class work?

Member 2 responded:

> Two that jumped out at me are 7c and 7h, where they talked about talking to a teacher about class work and getting feedback from the teacher. I was surprised that you are looking at almost 25% where the kids are saying they have never or rarely had feedback. I… that again is something that, because our class sizes are rather small, and our school population is small, that that is taking place on a regular basis. But, apparently, from the perception of the children . . . I am wondering are these the children who are struggling and they are falling through the cracks, or is it the other way around? The other end of the spectrum, the really bright kids who don't feel the need to have a discussion with their teachers about class work or grades.

Member 1 responded with the comment, "I have another question as you pose it. Are the teachers inviting that kind of dialogue?" Participants discussed the veracity of the data included in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and whether teachers had invited students to receive feedback. Member 5 responded:

> I think the question also is how accurate this is. I look at the numbers for us, because we are a small school, we know our kids individually, so when I see 10% here and 14% there, I can almost figure out which kids are saying, "I am just going to answer it this way" and other questions that are brought into account so that you can factor that in when you are doing your research. But, there is nobody that I can think of in the high school who hasn't had a conversation with his or her teacher about what happens in the classroom.

Member 1 responded with the comment, "I think there are some teachers who don't invite it. I think there are kids who want it." Member 5 responded:

It doesn't say "all your teachers" so I can't think of an invite from A to Z that hasn't had a conversation . . .if these students were just given this survey and there is no instruction, there is nobody really asking what do you really mean by "talking to the teacher."

Participants requested that I inquire whether students taking the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) may have asked for clarifications. I explained that term clarification emerged from the variety of approaches the survey presented to similar topics. Participants questioned

the time of year in which the survey was administered and whether timing might have skewed student responses. I informed the group that the survey was administered in April 2007. Member 8 referred to page 15, question 71.

Table 6

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 15, Question 71

Response	Frequency	Column %
Never	135	35.53
Rarely	141	37.11
Sometimes	84	22.11
Often	20	5.26
Total	380	100.00

Note. Question 71 was: How often have you: Worked on a paper or project that required you to interact with people outside of school (interviews, observations, etc.)

Member 8 responded:

Certainly, for the high school, I think that for "working outside of the school on projects and presentations" the senior internship program, which is a very big part of the senior year, could have a big impact on the numbers.

Member 2 responded:

Were they asked to reflect on specifically their high school years? Or, were they asked to reflect on their (names school district) education? Because as I look at 71, the project that requires you to interact with people outside of school, what jumped out at me was, gee if they are looking at their (name of school district) education . . . I mean every single second grader goes out into the community and interviews someone.

Member 5 responded with the comment, "The same thing with the internship, and every ninth grader has to give a speech in their class. You wonder what they are thinking." Member 8 continued and referred to page 13, question 7b.

Table 7

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 13, Question 7b

Response	Frequency	Column %
Never	10	2.58
Rarely	26	6.72
Sometimes	137	35.40
Often	214	55.30
Total	387	100.00

Note. Question 7b was: How often have you: Asked or answered questions in class?

Member 8 responded:

> Those are two dramatically different things, or can be for some kids. I would be very interested in separating those two into how much of each because we look at class participation and count that as class participation. But, you probably have your frequently called on kids, who are your frequent hand-raisers.

Member 3 commented:

> I am looking at what is the bottom line in terms of the data. I think that the percentages, the total percentages, school climate and relationships, those are really really strong. How I would look at it is that school engagement and classroom engagement . . . what are the questions that pull from and result in these percentages.

I requested that the group review pages 17, 19, 21, and 22 and suggested that pages 18 and 20 may also be of interest. Additionally, I reminded the group of the interview guide questions and referred to *Question 2* and *Question 4* for the first focus group meeting (see Appendix C).

Interview Guide - First Focus Group Meeting

Question 2:

How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to individualize opportunities for all students?

Question 4:

What are the most effective ways to share the data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with teachers?

Group participants spent 5 minutes reviewing pages 17, 19, 21, and 22. Member 8 referred to page 17, questions 7u and 7v.

Table 8

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 17, Question 7u

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Never	18	4.74
Rarely	63	16.58
Sometimes	163	42.89
Often	136	35.79
Total	380	100.00

Note. Question 7u was: How often have you: Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student or a race or ethnicity different from your own?

Table 9

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 17, Question 7v

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Never	21	5.50
Rarely	47	12.30
Sometimes	160	41.88
Often	154	40.31
Total	382	100.00

Note. Question 7v was: How often have you: Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student who differs from you in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, income background, or personal values?

Member 8 responded:

> I wonder how hard the kids have to think about who they work with to answer these questions. Because, on a positive note, I think a lot of times, at this point in our classrooms, they don't really think about that anymore. (Edit) So, looking at those numbers, I think they thought about it quite a bit.

Member 8 continued and referred to page 20, question 8i and page 22, question 11.

Table 10

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 20, Question 8i

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	36	9.57
Disagree	156	41.49
Agree	148	39.36
Strongly Agree	36	9.57
Total	376	100.00

Note. Question 8i was: I have worked harder than I expected to in school.

Table 11

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 22, Question 11

Responses	Frequency	Column %
None	19	5.05
1 or 2	82	21.81
Some	112	29.79
Most	123	32.71
All	40	10.64
Total	376	100.00

Note. Question 11 was: About how many of your classes challenge you academically?

Member 8 responded:

> In terms of the interview guide questions about their perceptions versus our perceptions, it seems to me frequently we get into conversations with more so parents than students, but they think they are not being challenged, and we think they are. We say, well if you say you are not being challenged, how come you are only getting an 87? How come you are not doing better? So, it turns into motivation. We need to look at the issue of challenge from different perspectives.

Member 3 continued and referred to page 21, questions 8m, and 8n.

Table 12

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 21, Question 8m

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	31	8.31
Disagree	117	31.37
Agree	189	50.67
Strongly Agree	36	9.65
Total	373	100.00

Note. Question 8m was: My schoolwork makes me curious to learn other things.

Table 13

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 21, Question 8n

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	56	14.85
Disagree	184	48.81
Agree	120	31.83
Strongly Agree	17	4.51
Total	377	100.00

Note. Question 8n: In general, I am excited about my classes.

Member 3 responded:

I was struck by, on page 21, kids 8n and 8m, the schoolwork not making them curious to learn other things and excitement about their classes. Those are very depressing. It shows, in certain ways, which is interesting . . . I see they feel connected to the teachers, by their responses. But, (names the high school principal) had mentioned something about 21st century skills, something we are going to be

addressing, which is great. Looking at the students' perceptions, because they are surely not seeing that connection, a lot of them, between high school and what comes after. It is just not there. It is not there on a number of these questions. It seems pretty consistent so far in terms of the kids' perceptions of it.

Member 2 continued and referred to page 21, question 8p.

Table 14

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 21, Question 8p

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	43	11.41
Disagree	89	23.61
Agree	189	50.13
Strongly Agree	56	14.85
Total	377	100.00

Note. Question 8p was: I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school.

Member 2 responded with the comment, "If you look at 8p, "I see how the work I am doing now will help me after

high school," 64% agree or strongly agree, so they must be seeing some connection." Member 2 continued to comment on a possible connection between question 8n and question 11 (see Tables 11 and 13) and suggested that students who perceive a lack of academic challenge may also report that they are not excited about their classes. A discussion between Member 3 and Member 5 continued to address whether 50% is an adequately positive percentage of students who reported that they are excited to learn things other than what they learn in school. In terms of querying students' excitement about school, Member 3 noted that curiosity requires differentiation from getting up in the morning and going to school. Member 1 responded:

> I think it's a little bit of a dilemma because we all know the research that says that curiosity disappears, as they get older and come into high school. And, we know that curiosity is an important skill for the future. If you are not curious, you won't ask questions. If you don't ask questions you are not going to solve problems and so forth, and it all fits into 21st century. I think it is typical for a portion of high school kids not to say that they are curious. I think our challenge is, 60% is good and it is more

than half. The challenge is how we create an atmosphere where most teenagers are curious the way they are when they are 5 or 6 years old. That is the challenge we are facing because if they are not curious, then they are going to be happy with the status quo, and they are going to be all the things we worry about with the future will come to fruition.

Member 4 continued and referred to page 23, question 15a.

Table 15

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 23, Question 15a

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	28	7.51
A little	86	23.06
Some	150	40.21
Very much	109	29.22
Total	373	100.00

Note. Question 15a was: My school emphasizes memorizing facts and figures in work for classes

Member 4 responded with the comment, "Almost 70% of them see school as memorizing facts and figures. I was nervous about that." Member 1 answered, "That is very

scary." Member 4 continued and referred to page 23, question 13.

Table 16

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 23, Question 13

Responses	Frequency	Column %
None	46	12.17
1 or 2	68	17.99
Some	106	28.04
Most	118	31.22
All	40	10.58
Total	378	100.00

Note. Question 13 was: In about how many classes do you give your maximum effort?

Member 4 responded with the comment, "It is about 41% and if you sum, it is up to about 70%." Member 1 responded: I am disappointed to think they think of school as memorizing and then I think of some of the staff and how they work with the kids. And, so much of what they are asking them to do is remember and give back facts with multiple-choice questions, which are the biggest kind of tests we give. That is what we ask for, so I think this is good because it is just another element (hand indicates HSSSE data printout) in our whole strategic plan. We are

thinking about changing the way we think about teaching and learning.

Member 2 continued and referred to page 24, question 15e.

Table 17

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 24, Question 15e

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	18	4.89
A little	66	17.93
Some	129	35.05
Very much	155	42.12
Total	368	100.00

Note. Question 15e was: My school emphasizes: Spending a lot of time preparing for state and district standardized tests.

Member 2 responded with the comment, "They say that 77% say they spend a lot of time preparing for state and district standardized tests." Member 4 responded:

I don't think that they (students) look at some of the questions on the standardized tests as critical thinking questions. When they have to take the facts that they know they have to memorize and concepts and extrapolate out to

find answers to critical thinking questions. That is a higher-level process itself.

Member 1 responded:

> When the teachers do that, the kids have this discomfort. We see it first in 10th grade with (names teacher) AP Euro. It drives the parents over the edge and the kids over the edge because you don't have those answers. The questions say, what did you learn, what do you think, and they are (hand gesture indicates confusion). It is that they can't get their "A" because they studied 5 hours. They can recite everything but they . . . Well, they don't know how to take what they have and . . . We are in the throes of change right now. I think we have to be able to support, as we are talking here right now, the teachers differently. The assessments have to look different.

Member 9 continued and referred to pages 21 and 22, questions 8o, and 8q.

Table 18

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 21, Question 8o

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	20	5.36
Disagree	77	20.64
Agree	205	54.96
Strongly Agree	71	19.03
Total	373	100.00

Note. Question 8o was: I value the rewards (grades, awards, etc.) that I get at school for my work

Table 19

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 22, Question 8q

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	19	5.09
Disagree	76	20.38
Agree	209	56.03
Strongly Agree	69	18.50
Total	373	100.00

Note. Question 8q was: I feel good about who I am as a student

Member 9 responded:

These are the self-esteem type questions. They are off the charts on the agree and strongly agree. It is very interesting. I think that even the students who might be going through it, marking down the "rarely, rarely" . . . these jumped out. We certainly have kids who are feeling good about themselves. This is consistent with some studies that I have seen on American students' self-perceptions.

Member 8 continued and again referred to page 21, question 8p.

Table 20

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 21 - Question 8p

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	43	11.41
Disagree	89	23.61
Agree	189	50.13
Strongly Agree	56	14.85
Total	377	100.00

Note. Question 8p was: I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school

Member 8 responded:

I think 8p is such a fundamental question (8p on page 21). Will this help me after high school? It is so dependent on their environment and family situation. I would be very interested in asking the same question in 4 years or 10 years, or 20 years. Was the stuff they learned in high school useful to them now? You are really asking them to project. This is the basic idea of education and very relevant to our 21stcentury view. I think that is an extremely significant question. Another one that I think we would get great value out of looking at deeper perceptions. I agree and strongly agree, 64% . . . what specifically are they thinking about? What are they doing right now that will help them? I would be curious to see if that matches what we think is significant and what they are doing now.

Due to time constraints, I suggested that the focus group proceed to review pages 34, 35, and 36. Participants took 5 minutes to read the suggested pages. Member 1 responded:

We are dealing with an issue in the middle school right now with reading, writing and language skills.

It is interesting to see that right now, we are roughly . . . 75% of the kids feel good about what they are learning and acquiring, and 25%, who are not becoming proficient in those areas. I guess I would like to think about those kids. It is not a surprise for me to see the statistics because I do believe we have been wrestling with looking at high school data moving kids. There is always 25%, or you go between 20 and 25%, who you can't move into that 75% range academically. And, there are kids who are struggling. I am not sure, if we are addressing their needs, or if we are getting them by. They are making it, but they are not, if they are not getting all of the skills they need. Even if they are taking the state assessments, they are passing, but they are not where they need to be. That has been consistent for a long time. Typically, the kids who fall into there (meaning the 25%) are new to our district, middle and or high school. They haven't come through our district. They are kids who come from immigrant families so they are dealing with other language issues. Or, some are dealing with some other kinds of family situations. I am not surprised with the statistic of kids who are

not feeling that we are addressing their needs and I am not satisfied that we are addressing it. Even with 75% or 80% of our population (gestures toward the HSSSE report and indicates the number of students who report that the school is addressing their needs) . . . there is a bit of our population who are being left behind.

Member 3 continued and referred to page 27, questions 16h, 16j, and 16k.

Table 21

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 27, Question 16h

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	39	10.60
A little	91	24.73
Some	155	42.12
Very much	63	22.55
Total	368	100.00

Note. Question 16h was: School contributed to growth: Learning independently

Table 22

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 27, Question 16j

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	56	15.30
A little	123	33.61
Some	125	34.15
Very much	62	16.94
Total	366	100.00

Note. Question 16j was: School contributed to growth: Gaining awareness of conditions in the community outside of school

Table 23

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 27, Question 16k

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	57	15.53
A little	97	26.43
Some	146	39.78
Very much	67	18.26
Total	367	100.00

Note. Question 16k was: School contributed to growth: Developing clear career goals

Member 3 responded:

On page 27, you start with 16h (see Table 22), you start with 34% are saying the school is not contributing to their independent functioning, learning, and solving real life problems. Forty-six percent are saying that you (the school) are not doing that. Awareness of conditions in the community, 48% are saying we haven't hit that. Developing clear career goals, which shocked me, 41%. The relevance to school work to life after school, is 39th percentile. I mean, those are pretty interesting statistics.

Member 2 responded:

16k, I am not so surprised about that. A lot of kids, when they leave high school, they really don't know what they want to do. And, it is not until they get into college . . . Or, after that, they . . . Well, they get into college and start working through a program and they say, "Whoa, this isn't for me" and they switch. So, this doesn't surprise me as much.

Member 5 responded with the comment, "Some of the jobs these people will be doing aren't even invented yet." Member 2 continued and referred to page 27, question 16i.

Table 24

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 27, Question 16i

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	82	22.22
A little	91	24.66
Some	147	39.84
Very much	49	13.28
Total	369	100.00

Note. Question 16i was: School contributed to growth: Solving real world problems

Member 2 responded with the comment, "But, the one that does surprise me is a lot is 16i, that they don't feel that we have taught them how to solve real world problems. That is a high number. Member 3 continued and referred to page 26, question 16g.

Table 25

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 26, Question 16g

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	36	9.86
A little	81	22.19
Some	169	46.30
Very much	79	21.64
Total	365	100.00

Note. Question 16g was: School contributed to growth: Working well with others

Member 3 responded with the comment, "If you look at 16g, "working well with others" on page 26." Member 4 answered, "67% say they do." Member 3 replied, "I don't think that is good." To which Member 4 said, "I am not saying that." Member 1 responded:

> It is because I did away with Junior/Senior Day. (The speaker refers to misconduct on the part of students that resulted in the cancellation of this event.) They used to claim that that was a time for them all to work together. It brought them all together. They used to tell us that at senior exit interviews. That was great. They had to solve these problems together. (Laughter from group)

Member 2 continued the discussion with a suggestion that specific questions on similar topics did not produce consistent results. Member 2 added, " When you compare some of these answers with some of the specific questions in here (gesture indicates the HSSSE report) the numbers don't match up." Member 4 continued and referred to page 26, question 16d.

Table 26

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 26, Question 16d

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	29	7.90
A little	54	14.71
Some	182	49.59
Very much	102	27.79
Total	367	100.00

Note. Question 16d was: School contributed to growth: Thinking critically

Member 4 responded:

You have some contradictions here. If you look at 16d, 77% say the school has contributed to their growth in terms of thinking critically and yet, they say that teaching they are being asked to learn facts.

Member 2 suggested that inconsistencies in student responses to questions on similar topics may result from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) having flaws comparable with those in "all surveys." The group identified the following issues that may account for inconsistencies in the HSSSE (2007) data: including too many questions, the month of administration, lack of adequate explanation, lack of understanding of the meaning of questions, small print, and difficulties for special education students. I clarified the process involved in filling out the HSSSE (2007) and pointed out that students were free to ask facilitators for clarifications.

I directed the focus group participants toward pages 34, 35, and 36. Group members made short reactive comments as they reviewed these pages. Group members engaged in a conversation about questions with drop down lists of possible answers from which students may have selected an appropriate choice for themselves. These questions recorded specific student responses *and* the number of students who did not make that same choice. Choices were calculated into frequencies with the number of students making that choice and a correlating percentage and the number of students who did not choose that particular

answer and a correlating percentage. Students who did not make that particular choice were recorded as *no response*. Focus group members spent several minutes discussing whether *no response* meant a refusal to respond or indicated an alternative response. Member 5 clarified the scoring method for Member 2.

Member 2 referred to pages 34 and 35, questions 24 and 25. Question 25 presented six possible choices, all of which are included below.

Table 27

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 24

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Never	5	1.34
Once or twice	16	4.29
Once in a while	105	28.15
Every Day	197	52.82
Every Class	50	13.40
Total	373	100.00

Note. Question 24 was: Have you ever been bored in class in high school?

Table 28

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 25

Responses	Frequency	Column %
No response	278	70.74
Yes	115	29.26
Total	393	100.00

Note. Question 25 was: Why bored? Work wasn't challenging enough?

Table 29

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 25

Responses	Frequency	Column %
No response	282	71.76
Yes	111	28.24
Total	393	100.00

Note. Question 25 was: Why bored? Work was too difficult

Table 30

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 25

Responses	Frequency	Column %
No response	82	20.87
Yes	311	79.13
Total	393	100.00

Note. Question 25 was: Why bored? Work wasn't interesting

Table 31

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 25

Responses	Frequency	Column %
No response	245	62.34
Yes	148	37.66
Total	393	100.00

Note. Question 25 was: Why bored? Material wasn't relevant to me

Table 32

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 25

Responses	Frequency	Column %
No response	275	69.97
Yes	118	30.03
Total	393	100.00

Note. Question 25 was: Why bored? No interaction with the teacher

Table 33

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 25

Responses	Frequency	Column %
No response	343	87.28
Yes	50	12.72
Total	393	100.00

Note. Question 25 was: Why bored? Other

Member 3 commented, "(Whistles) Wow. Every day." Member 1 said, "Yes, that is the cool thing, to be bored." Member 2 responded with the comment, "But, that is a lot of kids. You are talking about 70% on number 25. Why were you bored? The work wasn't challenging enough. Seventy percent of the kids didn't even answer it." Member 3 referred to

pages 35, 36 and 37, questions 26a, 26b, 26c, 26d, 26e, 26f, 26g, 26h, and 26i.

Table 34

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 35, Question 26a

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	162	44.51
A little	117	32.14
Some	71	19.51
Very much	14	3.85
Total	364	100.00

Note. Question 26a was: What excites/engages you?: Teacher lecture

Table 35

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 35, Question 26b

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	47	13.02
A little	72	19.94
Some	142	39.34
Very much	100	27.70
Total	361	100.00

Note. Question 26b was: What excites/engages you?: Discussion and debate

Table 36

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 35, Question 26c

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	145	40.17
A little	123	34.07
Some	61	16.90
Very much	32	8.86
Total	361	100.00

Note. Question 26c was: What excites/engages you?: Individual reading

Table 37

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 36, Question 26d

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	156	43.33
A little	112	31.11
Some	72	20.00
Very much	20	5.56
Total	360	100.00

Note. Question 26d was: What excites/engages you?: Writing projects

Table 38

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 36, Question 26e

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	119	32.87
A little	121	33.43
Some	99	27.35
Very much	23	6.35
Total	362	100.00

Note. Question 26e was: What excites/engages you?: Research projects

Table 39

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 36, Question 26f

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	60	16.76
A little	89	24.86
Some	150	41.90
Very much	59	16.48
Total	358	100.00

Note. Question 26f was: What excites/engages you?: Group projects

Table 40

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 36, Question 26g

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	109	30.53
A little	99	27.73
Some	120	33.61
Very much	29	8.12
Total	357	100.00

Note. Question 26g was: What excites/engages you?: Presentations

Table 41

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 36, Question 26h

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	108	30.51
A little	104	29.38
Some	96	27.12
Very much	46	12.99
Total	354	100.00

Note. Question 26h was: What excites/engages you?: Role plays

Table 42

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 37, Question 26i

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Not at all	87	24.44
A little	85	23.88
Some	87	24.44
Very much	97	27.25
Total	356	100.00

Note. Question 26i was: What excites/engages you?: Art and drama activities

Member 3 commented, "I want to know what excites them. Nothing. None of the choices are here that excites them. Except, teacher lecture is the best. Teacher lecture, some or very much. I added those so that is 22%." Member 2 replied, "You are talking about 70% on number 25. Why were you bored? The work wasn't challenging enough." Member 3 continued, "On number 25, versus no interaction with teacher? The reason you are bored is because the teacher didn't interact with you." A brief conversation among members ensued with a focus on the ethnic identities of students. Member 3 picked up the conversation and said, "I want to know what excites them. Nothing. None of the choices are here that excites them. Except, teacher lecture is the best. Teacher lecture, some or very much. I added those so that is 22%. Now, if you . . . now, I go down. Discussion and debate." Group members made brief comments about students enjoying the passion of discussion and debate as an opportunity to passionately share opinions. Member 1 commented that these discussions lack content. Member 8 brought the discussion back to the interview guide.

Interview Guide - Questions 2 and 3.

2. How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2005) to individualize opportunities for all students?

3. What do students indicate that they do to learn out of school that may enhance how they learn while in school?

Member 8 asked, "OK, so for the critical questions. How do we use this data to individualize opportunities? How do we use this to enhance what they have learned?" Member 8 continued:

> Here's specific stuff on . . . Ok, they don't like lecture and they like discussion and debate. They like role-playing. We could have probably guessed at many of these things. But, a lot of the other questions about being bored and relating to teachers and answering questions, and all that other stuff . . . it (speaker indicates the interview guide) asks what are the most effective ways to get the most bang out of your survey buck, you know, probably your target group are your "sometimes" kids. Your "no or never" are your negative kids, they are just going to do that. You've got the self-motivated kids that are cooking along.

That middle group and particularly the lower middle, those are the kids. So, maybe you take a handful of these questions, and you, you know this is anonymous, and you find a way to get real kid-by-kid responses. Maybe at the teacher level they can ask these exact same questions just within their classes and the data goes no further than that class.

Member 8 referred to page 18, question 8b.

Table 43

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 18, Question 8b

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Strongly disagree	8	2.13
Disagree	14	3.73
Agree	204	54.40
Strongly Agree	149	39.73
Total	375	100.00

Note. Question 8b was: I have the skills and ability to complete my work

Member 8 responded saying, "For some teachers, say 8b, that 'some' group is your target group. That is how to get

the most positive change with this information." Member 3 added:

> But, it is in the school engagement, classroom engagement area that is your lowest percentage. If you want to take that and zero in on it in terms of the "some", and the questions (speaker indicates the interview guide) that link to these. In terms of the "some" kids, those "some" percentages, that is what you want to focus in on.

Member 1 referred to *Question 4* in the interview guide.

Interview Guide - Question 4

What are the most effective ways to share the data collected in the HSSSE (2006) with teachers?

Member 1 responded:

> I would like to ask the question to the teacher sitting in that classroom, how important is it to have 100% of their students engaged in the activity that they plan for the day? As they are planning that activity, that presentation, or whatever they are doing, are they considering that it has to interest and motivate children or, am I doing this because it is the next topic in the book? I think our teachers

are in a really good place because of the other data that looks at school climate and relationship. And, when students are asked if teachers care about you, if they want you to do a good job, there is a question that asks specifically about that, and then the percentages are off the charts. Their teachers want them to do well. Now, what do the teachers have to do to address the needs of the students? Some of it comes back to the teachers, and I think that if they can be more creative, and that is what we have been discussing . . . how does the presentation of material have to change a little bit? Member 8 and I were just discussing, we have a teacher in the high school that, when the library was being cleaned out, went and grabbed all of the old filmstrips and the filmstrip projector. We can't get rid of it because the teacher claims it is important. Kids are looking at this and you want to say what do you need this for when you have the Internet? What could this filmstrip, that you can barely see, with people dressed as if it is 1952, offer you? If you want to engage kids, you have to engage kids. Well, I think part of this comes back to if teachers want to reflect on their practice, and

that is one of our major themes this year, we want teachers to reflect on their practice. As they reflect on their practice, we want them to think about the future and the future citizens that they are preparing. How does this data help them move to the next level? The survey seemed timely because it fit into the whole district initiative, and it is a small piece and can help in the dialogue. So, we are at a good starting point, I think.

Member 3 referred to Question 5 in the interview guide.

Interview Guide - Question 5

What are the most effective ways to share data collected in the HSSSE (2006) with parents and community members?

The focus group participants agreed that the data gleaned from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), if misinterpreted by parents and community members, may be politically problematic. I thanked the administrators and asked if there were any final comments. Member 2 focused on the preponderance of HSSSE (2007) data in which student responses were divided into 75% who, "think we are doing a good job," and 25% who do not.

Member 2 asked:

Who are these kids that are feeling that we are not comfortable with writing strategies or they are not comfortable getting up and doing an oral presentation. And, as educators, in the classroom, are we letting these kids fall through the cracks?

Member 1 responded to Member 2:

You know, #2, which is absolutely . . . I couldn't agree with you more. As a high school, we could multiply it district-wide; we could also bring it down to each individual teacher in his or her classroom with 22 kids sitting in front of them. So, if 24% of them are not doing a good job, are there four or five kids who are not having their needs addressed? And, I am sure there probably are.

Member 3 responded:

What really stood out was one of the biggest areas that had to do with that (differentiation). And, I do think that the models we are using fit beautifully into this (gestures toward the HSSSE report). Even the language, when you talk about student engagement and so forth. If teachers can start using that and thinking more about that in terms of the language of

how do you engage kids. How do you use that exact terminology, that language, so that everybody is talking about the same type of things? There are two areas where we are lower than we should be (school engagement and classroom engagement). If it were 80%, I would feel excited, across the board. I feel we should be pleased we do have those strong percentages in school climate and relationships. That is fantastic.

I thanked the administrators for their participation in the first focus group interview and concluded the session.

Summary of the first focus group meeting. In the first focus group meeting, due to the volume of data on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), I directed the administrators' attention toward pre selected survey pages. I distributed copies and read aloud from the research and interview guide questions that corresponded with the content of the data and guided the discussion. During the meeting, the administrators read the HSSSE (2007) data on the selected pages and shared their perceptions.

The focus group began with administrators reviewing data on survey pages 13, 14, 15, and two questions at top of page 16. These questions related to Research Question 1 and Interview Guide questions 1, 2, and 3 (see Appendix C). The questions included 7e, 7o, 7m, 7c, 7h, 7l, and 7b, related students' classroom engagement, relationships with teachers and relationships with other students.

I observed that the administrators' responses to these questions appeared to fit into four general categories. First, administrators registered emotional reactions that expressed surprise, disappointment, disbelief, and less frequently, gratification over the percentage of students who gave positive, negative or neutral answers to specific questions. Second, based on students' responses, administrators questioned the internal validity, reliability, and construction of the survey. Third, administrators questioned the integrity and seriousness with which the students responded to the survey. Fourth, the administrators framed questions that reflected their willingness to evaluate policies and practices that may have impacted students' responses and might be considered as factors in redesigning programs in the small high school that is the focus of this study.

Next, I asked the administrators to review data on pages 17, 19, 21, and 22. These data, which corresponded to questions 7u, 7v, 8i, 11, 8m, 8n, 8m, 8p, 15a, 13, 15e, 8o, 8q, 8p, 16h, 16j, 16k, 16i, and 16g related to working collaboratively with peers inside and outside the classroom, levels of academic challenge experienced by students, and the degree to which students felt themselves to be curious, excited or bored by schoolwork. Additionally, these data related to school relevance and students' perceptions of themselves as effective, self-directed learners.

Administrators' responses to the data presented on pages 17, 19, 21, and 22, included questions about the meaning of language used in the HSSSE (2007) and the meaning of the words "challenge," or, "boredom" in terms of how students might perceive their meaning or intentionally want to report being bored to be "cool." The administrators appeared baffled (non verbal responses included head nods and furrowed brows) as they considered the percentage of students who reported a lack of curiosity about learning. One administrator asked how understanding what students mean by words such as "challenge" could impact the development of school programs that encourage and maintain

curiosity in students throughout the course of their K-12 education. Administrators acknowledged students' survey responses that indicated that the curriculum requires rote learning and simultaneously that a majority of students experience discomfort with open-ended questions and assignments. The focus group participants also noted that an overwhelming majority of students reported feeling cared about by adults in the high school. Finally, one administrator asked how the school might better address the needs of students who had answered "some," the most neutral answer choice available for many of the survey's questions, when asked about learning-style preferences, choices of activities, or attitudes toward schoolwork.

I directed the administrators' attention to data presented on pages 35, 36, and 37 of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). These data related to questions 24, 25 (Tables 29-34),26a, 26b, 26c, 26d, 26e, 26f, 26g, 26h, and 26i which refer to preferences for classroom learning modalities including, lecture, individual reading, discussion, debate, writing, research projects, group projects, presentations, role plays, and arts integration into curriculum.

Administrators registered surprise at the large percentage of students whose answers reflected no particular preferences for any learning modality. At that point, the discussion shifted to the importance of more deeply engaging students who currently report average levels of engagement. One administrator suggested that the results of the survey, presented in small group and one-on-one discussions with students, might clarify the meaning of the survey questions, so that teachers could gain a deeper understanding of the kinds of teaching and learning that would effectively engage these students.

The focus group discussed the importance of addressing the instructional needs of the students who respond "some" in answer to questions about learning-style preferences and attitudes toward schoolwork. An administrator pointed toward the need for teachers to employ creativity and integrate technology to excite students and maintain their interest. Although the focus group members agreed that teachers should share the data in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007), they agreed that the data should not be shared with parents or community members. I assumed that the administrators did not want the data shared with

parents and community members because some of it may have reflected negatively on the school district.

In conclusion, the administrators commented on the need for differentiated instruction in classrooms, citing that percentages of disengaged students translate into actual numbers in a classroom. For example, the group agreed that if 24% of students are not engaged in a class of 22 students, that means that four or five students are not having their needs addressed. Finally, the meeting concluded with a consensus that classroom engagement rates need to be at 80% or higher overall and should meet the high level of comfort with school climate that these students reported.

The purpose of this summary was to provide an overview of the first focus group's tone and discussion as they responded to data on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). Chapter V will present a detailed analysis of the administrators' responses to the HSSSE (2007) and related literature that was introduced in Chapter II.

The second focus group meeting. The second focus group discussion took place in the middle school principal's

office. The focus group included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal, both of whom are directly responsible for the initiation and implementation of curricular and extracurricular programs at the middle and secondary levels. These administrators took part in the first focus group discussion. For the purpose of this focus group discussion, to ensure confidentiality and continuity, both participants utilized the same member number designations as they did in the first focus group meeting.

I began the second focus group meeting with an introduction to the purpose of the discussion. Each participant was provided with a copy of the report of data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and a copy of the interview guide questions. I requested that group members review the interview guide questions, one through five, for the second meeting (see Appendix C). I drew the participants' attention toward questions one and two in the portion of the interview guide intended for the second focus group.

Interview Guide Questions 1 and 2

1. What kinds of programs might be developed based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Achievement (HSSSE, 2007)?

2. How might the school utilize data collected on the High School Survey of Student Achievement (HSSSE, 2007) to develop opportunities that enhance individualized learning?

The interview began when I posed a spontaneous question, based on questions one and two (above), to initiate a dialogue connected to three points raised in the first focus group meeting. Those points included teacher's engagement of students, student's engagement in school and what administrators may wish to see shift in terms of increasing student motivation. I asked:

> We talked about different strategies in the classroom and how engaged the teacher might be in engaging the kids. What do you do about kids who are living in this area, going to a small school where they are known, but they are not necessarily motivated the way you would like them to be motivated?

Member 1 began with a personal story about a female senior student who had, during the previous academic year, been elected class president. Member 1 recounted seeing this graduate working at a local diner during the following

summer and realizing that both she and the head of guidance services, with whom she was with, did not know this student well. Member 1 commented:

> Honestly, I don't know where she is going to college. I know where all these others are going and I don't know what she's doing with herself. She's a kid who can be extremely successful in life and I don't know if I've engaged her. She'll probably say positive things about our high school. So, how do I engage that child? I don't know if I have an answer. I know it is a need. I really do know it's a need and I watched her this summer, we went in a few times, (names the director of guidance) and she said, "Who is that?" She's the president of the senior class, how could that happen?

Member 1 continued to recount that although this student was on athletic teams, she did not distinguish herself on the field or academically. This student's parents were not involved in the school. Member 1 remarked that this student's interpersonal skills, which she demonstrated in her work at the diner, may have contributed to her becoming a senior class president, and yet the school did not capitalize on her talent. Member 1 said,

"Because, I wonder if we could have engaged her more. Maybe we didn't find her talent. Those are the questions I ask myself."

I asked, "As we look at 21st century skills and we move into re designed programs, are we missing things like interpersonal skills as an area to develop?" Member 1 continued to recount an incident in which the previously mentioned senior class president was required for a photo shoot, and neither she nor the head of guidance could remember this student's name. Furthermore, the principal described how she typically knows the names of students, and particular names come to mind repeatedly when a student representative is required for a publicity opportunity or speech. Member 1 concluded, "We have to do more. I don't know the answer."

Member 8 responded:

> You do hear a lot about employers criticizing colleges for producing students that don't have, whatever it is . . . can't write a memo at work. But, a lot of it is that they don't have interpersonal skills. At the middle school level, we see it. Go to graduation, and some kids don't know how to shake your hand when they accept their award . . . eye contact when they talk.

> They come from different backgrounds. When we look at a student being the president of a class, they might have developed a rapport after years of being with that same age cohort of theirs. But, put them in a different situation, they don't know how to adapt. Really, what we are looking to do is to graduate kids and send them out into new situations with new kinds of people. It's, I think, the ability to adapt is what we really need to be looking for. As computers make the world look smaller, and we frequently don't have to go places, we are looking at people from different cultures when we didn't used to. We are on the phone with people from India or from Asia, from Europe. I think we need more adaptability in how we teach interpersonal skills.

I asked the focus group participants if and how their secondary educations prepared them for leadership positions, and what students today may need that differs from the past. Member 8 commented:

> I think part of that is the age-old nature nurture argument. You know, it's the athlete. Sometimes you either have it or you don't. But, then there's all sorts of grey areas in between. Those who don't have

> it could lapse if they don't use it. Those that don't have it could work at it and make it serviceable. So, I think part of it is nature, you know? But, we are in the business of nurture. So, the real question is, for those who don't have it by nature, how we overcome that.

Member 1 responded, "How we overcome it is by creating opportunities for these very low skills in order to achieve a goal." Member 1 recounted how her experiences on a forensics debate team enhanced her ability to communicate. In relation to today's students, Member 1 commented:

> Whether it is the creative writer and we figure out how to do that, or the finance kid, and we figure out how to do that. But, it's thinking about different things that kids need, giving them opportunities to explore, and then trying to match those up with what we know the 21st century skills should be. So, the finance kid, what is he doing that could be kind of his interest? What is it that he could be doing to give him that global perspective which I know he needs?

I referred to the interview guide question 5 for the second focus group meeting.

Interview Guide - Question 5

What do you see as the relationship between student engagement, perceived teacher support, and the development of curriculum that directly affect student achievement?

Based on question 5, I asked Member 1 if substantive change, achieved through administrators working one-on-one with teachers, results in the redesign of school programs. Member 1 said that one-on-one interactions are a primary means by which to implement new program plans. Member 1 shared a story about how, when she had wanted to change the high school's math program from a consumer-based mathematics program to a Regent's sequential math program (a New York State standards-based course series developed by a state-level Board of Regents with accompanying examinations), a particular teacher was willing to "throw out the book." Member 1 asserted that without this teacher's support, she would not have been positioned to implement this change. Member 8 commented:

> But, without the teacher, without the one-on-one, and saying we are going to the Board and we are throwing consumer math out, we are throwing this out and everyone is going to take the Regent's and their

> scores might dip. You know, and I need permission to do that. I need permission to . . . you know . . . we did all of those things. That is how . . . that is how an administrator can make it happen. There are factors that will contribute to it that will get in the way of its being accomplished. But that one-on-one eventually is probably what has to be done. People making the change. You can talk about it, you can read about it, you can bring the experts in, and have the consultant, you can watch the TV shows, [but nothing happens] unless somebody is willing to take the risk.

I continued to focus on interview guide question 5 and asked the participants whether 21st century teachers need to establish relationships with students outside of their subject areas. Member 1 responded:

> It is relationship, flexibility, and a teacher who is willing to throw out what the book says you should do and figure out that people learn in a lot of different ways. And the reason I tell you the (names the first math teacher spoken of herein) doesn't learn in the conventional way. She struggled as a student through high school and college. It didn't come easy to her.

So, she was able to figure out a way out herself to be accomplished in the subject. And that allows her, because she looks at that lens for herself as a learner, to translate that into being a teacher. So, yeah, it is relationship, flexibility, creativity, it's sensitivity. You talk about differences in the world. That translates back to learning differences.

Member 8 responded:

I think they [teachers] have to be goal oriented and they have to . . . they have to have a certain amount of passion for what they do and see their daily work as a career and not as a job. And, when that question comes, and when it's . . . that kid walks into your room and you are about to walk down the hall to the teachers' room and hang out for a little while . . . do you say, "Come back at period X" or, do you say, "Show me what you got?" It's that moment. Which type of teacher? When no one else is looking, what do they (teachers) do in that situation?

Member 1 added, "When teachers and students have this positive relationship, they are going to support each other."

I asked the participants to consider interview guide question 3 included in the second focus group discussion.

Interview Guide - Question 3

3. How might academic rigor be increased based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)?

Member 8 referred to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) page 34, question 24.

Table 44

HSSSE (2007) Frequencies: Page 34, Question 24

Responses	Frequency	Column %
Never	5	1.34
Once or twice	16	4.29
Once in a while	105	28.15
Every Day	197	52.82
Every Class	50	13.40
Total	373	100.00

Note. Question 24 was: Have you ever been bored in class in high school?

Member 8 responded:

I think that whatever the scientific definition of force is is when you can apply some kind of intellectual challenge that forces them to whatever tool you are using. Whether it is a group project, or humor, or (gestures with hand) you want this "A" don't you?" Or, whatever the tool is. You can apply some kind of intellectual force. So, really what we are talking about is learning the language of the boredom. Why are they bored, and finding the key, which may be different for different kids. So, I think it is a matter of degree. I don't think you are ever going to get to the destination. And, what I think we are continually looking to do is to strive to get closer to finding more and more of those communication keys for the kid in the front row . . . what motivates him or her? What motivates this one? I think it is an ongoing process.

Member 1 added:

If you need an answer as to how do you increase the rigor and what is that, and what does it mean? I think that it goes back to the person. I think each teacher has to learn reflective practice and many of

them have it. These schools of education are building that into their teacher training programs. If it doesn't come naturally to the teachers we have on staff that is going to be our biggest challenge, because there are some teachers who don't reflect on their practice and ask themselves, "Is this difficult enough?" To celebrate that all kids did very well, that's great. You can say, all kids did very well, I got my point across, I taught them. But, you can also say, all kids did very well; did I ask challenging enough questions? Or, should it be a little more challenging? Is the question open-ended enough? Is the task open-ended enough? Did it allow for creativity? If I want it to be rigorous, I want to make sure that I have opened it up and that it allows for creativity for kids to come up with crazy ideas that they can then go out and test. That's what I want them to do. So, it is different for every kid, and so I agree with (names the middle school principal). It comes back to the teacher. So, we need to help the teachers reflect about their practices.

I asked the participants to consider interview guide question 4 included in the second focus group discussion.

Interview Guide - Question 4

What kinds of programs might enhance student preparedness for the 21st century workplace based on the learning objectives outlined by the Partnership for 21stCentury Skills (2005) including technological literacy, cultural literacy, global awareness and communication skills?

I asked the focus group members whether the provision of opportunities for 21stcentury students, including the skills listed above, may be built into redesigned programs considering the volume of content already required and meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S.DOE, 2001). Furthermore, I asked what these administrators see their schools "looking like" in 2 years, 4 years and 6 years. Member 8 observed that in the school district that is the focus of this study, the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act are being met and, therefore, [the requirements] are no longer the "bucket of cold water that it was." Member 8 asserted that a primary focus, in this school, is centered on interactions between adults and children.

Member 8 continued:

That is a vast question. I think, again, going back to the personnel, if the end result is to have a rigorous program, or graduate kids at a certain level, or whatever the goal may be . . . I think the kids need to feel, and I think some of the questions in the survey (gestures toward the HSSSE 2007 survey report) that allude to this. The kids need to feel that the school and the people in it care about them and relate to them . . . that the students find the teachers, as people, interesting. I find it extremely gratifying when a parent tells me that a student was talking about school at dinner. That the student brought something up. If they are talking about school outside of school, involuntarily, you've found that key. You've found something. You've struck some kind of chord. So, I think getting the staff to value that connection and value the impact that they have on kids, which can be very substantial . . . people that the kids will remember into their adulthood and tell their friends about . . . you know, "I used to have a teacher that . . . ". If the teachers in the building recognize this impact and as part of their daily mission try to establish and nurture that positive

affect and make themselves an adult resource for that student, as opposed to simply being the sixth period science teacher. That is what I would like the staff to look like in several years.

Member 1 commented:

My lofty goal goes back to your first question. Which is that I think we have given opportunity to the self-motivated, high achieving kids, and because they ask for it, it is easy to find something and give it to them. And, I do believe that we have a lot of different opportunities in place for children who need either extended rigor or academic intervention. One way or another, whether it is a mandated program or a local program, I think we have done that and have looked at it. I think and hope that in 2 years, that middle group of kids has become more of an active participant in our school.

Member 1 continued to speak about the need to involve students who arrive at the school from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances and who, over time, do integrate into the life of the school, and in particular, do not participate in activities outside of the classroom.

Based on the interview guide question 4 for the second focus group meeting, I asked the focus group members about the feasibility of redesigning high school programs to meet the needs of 21st century students. Member 1 gestured toward a copy of the research questions and referenced the second question.

Research Question 2

2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?

Interview Guide Second Focus Group Meeting - Question 4

4. What kinds of programs might enhance student preparedness for the 21stcentury workplace based on the learning objectives outlined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005) including technological literacy, cultural literacy, global awareness, and communication skills?

Member 1 responded:

I would like to say that everything is a possibility. Because there are requirements needed for graduation, sometimes it is not. But, that doesn't mean that we can't re-think how we get kids to take the required examinations that they need. I would like to think

way out of the box and then come back to something that is reasonable. What I have been talking about a lot is something I think . . . a four-year high school shouldn't exist anymore. I think that there should be a three-year high school or a five-year high school. I think some kids need more time to get through high school. It is really what colleges have evolved into. There are kids who need to take fewer classes, study, do well, study in depth. If the goal . . . and as (names the middle school principal)said it has to be goal-oriented . . . if the goal is to get your high school diploma and move on to post-secondary education, and if that is 5 years and we have to re design the way you do that, that's fine. There is no problem there. And, there are some kids who really don't need to be here for 4 years because they have done everything. They need to get out to the world. So, the answer is, do they leave us and go off to college? Or, do they have what we now call the fifth year as the fourth year, where there really is an externship maybe, and they are just not here. Maybe they satisfy some of their requirements for that

fourth year of English and that fourth year of social studies out in the world. I think all of those are possibilities. It's different to convince people. To do that in some communities is harder to do. I think if I was back in New York City, it would be easier to do. You can take that kind of risk and you can have more opportunity to do it, and people are more . . . you have more supports to do things like that. Here, I think we do things very conservatively and a risk means, that's great and it's a great idea, but wait until my kid gets into Harvard, and then you can play with that nonsense. I feel . . . I feel that this idea is not as much out of the realm of reality as it used to be 5 years ago. Because, I am hearing from reading the Partnership for the 21st Century and from reading about the summits that Bill Gates ran with the school leaders, that there needs to be a change a little bit in how we prep our kids. So, are there half of our kids who are all finished high school at the end of their junior year? And, we've pushed things down over the years. Where those kids who are bright . . . more capable, they are doing high school work in middle

school. So we . . . but, we haven't changed high school. So, we push it down earlier but we haven't done anything at the other end to say, "Ok, you can continue to be accelerated." So, now what?

Member 8 added that a "personal" and "flexible" approach to duration of time in high school and graduation readiness may be required.

Member 1 responded:

Those are two really good words. Personal approach and flexibility. And, as you look to the 21st century, you say our workers need to have that to be successful in the economy that they are going to work in. But, I think in order to model that, if we don't change, how are we going to change the mindset of the children who are going to enter the world? It is going to be like culture shock for them to go through this and then be out there. And, I like those two words. I think that if we hold onto those two words as we plan and we bring it back to the classroom and ask teachers to hold onto those two words as they look at their children, as they look at their subject, look at what they have to do each year. And, always come back and

> say, "Am I personalizing it? Am I being flexible in my thinking and my approach?" I think we will do different things. And, those two simple words have to somehow continue to infuse into our practice, into our language. I think that little by little you get teachers to jump on board.

Member 1 said that an important component of the redesign of high school programs included the hiring of new teachers who reflect 21st century values and skills. Those values and skills include a willingness to integrate technology and technological expertise, subject-area expertise, and interests and life experiences beyond the classroom.

I asked the administrators if they planned to share the data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) with teachers in academic year 2007-2008. Member 1 answered that the most effective means of disseminating the data would be through department chairpersons as they assist with the re direction of curriculum. Member 8 suggested that, as an initial introduction and to start a dialogue, the HSSSE (2007) data may be presented as a game in which questions from the

survey are read aloud and teachers guess what percentage of students gave a particular answer. Member 8 added, "But, if we just pick a few, I think it would be great food for thought and a way to start a conversation. And, I think it would give you a great view as to your perception question." Member 1 concurred with the game approach to introducing teachers to the HSSSE (2007) data and added:

> I want to share this (holds up the HSSSE report) with (names the superintendent) tomorrow because he asked me how the meeting went (reference to the first focus group interview), and he apologized for having to run out, but I think if he sees the research questions he will at least know what the focus of this is. And, he will be able to see . . . I kept saying to him it is wonderful, and the data is really helpful and will fit into our plans here in the district. And so the message here is what we are doing, you are the leaders and we want you to have the information before anyone else does. And it is 21st century goals, enhancing professional practice, and all of that goes to engaging children, and why do we want to engage kids? It fits all together.

I thanked the focus group members for their time and concluded the interview.

Summary of the second focus group meeting. In the second focus group meeting, I suggested that the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal (Member 1) and the middle school principal (Member 8) refer to their copies of the interview guide for the second focus group. Also available for these administrators were copies this study's research questions and copies of the data gleaned from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). I steered the discussion with references to the interview guide questions and auxiliary open-ended questions. Otherwise, the participants were free to address any of the research questions or refer to any data in the HSSSE (2007).

In the discussion, which lasted for one hour, I observed that the administrators openly shared their concerns, identified challenges and expressed optimism as they considered school reform efforts and the need for redesigned secondary programs. The administrators discussed the following topics. First, they must address the need for the school administrators and teachers to implement more

effective talent-development programs that enhance knowledge of individual students and that address 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005). Second, the administrators identified the need for students to learn and practice communication skills. Third, the discussion focused on the importance of working directly with individual teachers to encourage the integration of new curricula and differentiated strategies in classrooms. Fourth, the focus group participants directed attention toward the need for administrators and teachers to talk to students and acquire a more detailed understanding of students' perceptions of what bores, excites and motivates their learning. Fifth, the administrators recognized the need for teachers to reflect on their practices and value the impact and influence of relationships that develop between young people and adults at school. Sixth, the discussion focused on the development of a flexible and personal approach to the possibility of shortening or lengthening students' tenure in high school, from 3 to 5years, according to individual needs and interests. Finally, the administrators talked about hiring teachers whose varied backgrounds provide a foundation for inspiring

students and the need for teachers to share in discussions based on the data gleaned from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007).

Throughout the second focus group discussion, I observed that the two participating administrators were enthusiastic and optimistic about driving a forward-looking vision of school reform. Both administrators saw relationships between adults and adults and children within the school as the primary elements in fostering school change. Furthermore, I noted the attention, interest, insight, and passion expressed by each participant as the interview progressed.

The purpose of this summary was to provide an overview of the second focus group's tone and discussion as they responded to data on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). Chapter V will present a detailed analysis of the administrators' responses to the HSSSE (2007) and to the related literature that was introduced in Chapters I and II. Also included in Chapter V are my observations and recommendations for future research and policies that, based on the HSSSE (2007) data and administrators' perceptions, may enhance the adoption of

plans for redesigned secondary-level programs in the high school that is the focus of this study.

Chapter V

Analysis of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In response to calls for high school reforms that address changes in global competitiveness and increased demands on the American workforce (Friedman, 2005) this study focused on gleaning administrators' perceptions of student engagement as reported by students on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). The study was conducted in a small high school with a student population of 434, located in Westchester County, New York. Due to absences and one parent requesting an opt-out for his child on the day of the HSSSE (2007) administration, the research sample included 393 HSSSE (2007) student respondents. The range of respondents to any particular question was between 348 and 393 students.

This high school's administrators had articulated a need to redesign high school programs and an interest in including student engagement and student voice as a component in the redesign development process. The purpose

of the redesign plans is to prepare students for the anticipated demands of a global economy in which American workers will need the skills to apply innovative approaches to solving real-world problems, apply technological advances, and have the interpersonal skills necessary to communicate in a global work environment (Friedman, 2005).

The goals of this study were fourfold: (a) to utilize data on student engagement collected in a small high school to gather the perceptions of administrators as they prepare to consider programmatic changes; (b)to increase student achievement levels by implementing programs that enhance school relevance, increase opportunities for individualized talent development, and prepare students for educational prospects beyond high school;(c) to create programs that integrate 21st century Internet-based applications by increasing technology and project-based opportunities into redesigned high school programs (Friedman, 2005); (d) to develop a redesign plan that may lead to further studies in small high schools with comparable demographics.

Chapter I presented the problem to be studied. High schools provide a viable opportunity for a response to change in the delivery and structure of secondary education that will prepare American students to enter a competitive

global workforce (Small Schools Project, 2005). In order to initiate substantial school improvement efforts, administrators in successful small high schools need replicable models and systemic redesign plans that are based on knowledge of student engagement, go beyond traditional curriculum and scheduling structures, and provide flexible innovative approaches to program development (Shannon & Blysma, 2006). For program redesign to be effective, it must also include students as active participants in shaping their futures (Cook-Sather, 2002).

To explore the relationship between administrators' perceptions of student engagement and student responses to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007), three research questions were asked:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?
2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?
3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of school programs redesigned to help students gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-

direction, global awareness and social responsibility (Partnership for the 21st Century, 2006)?

In order to address these questions, two administrative focus groups were conducted. Administrators in these groups were asked to respond to data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). The first focus group consisted of seven district administrators including the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, the assistant superintendent for finance, the director of special services, the director of guidance services, the middle school principal, the elementary principal for kindergarten through first grade, and the elementary principal for second through fourth grade.

The second focus group included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal. The decision to include only these two administrators was made by the first administrative focus group as they felt that the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal were most directly involved in the redesign of high school programs.

Chapter II contained a review of the literature that focused on theoretical frameworks and research interest in the cognitive and affective components of learning and the impact of learning environments on students. Chapter III described the methodology used in this study to garner qualitative administrators' responses to the quantitative data collected in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). Chapter IV presented the data collected in two focus group discussions with administrators who work in the district that contains the small high school that is the focus of this study. Chapter V offers an analysis of data, conclusions, and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary of Research

An analysis of the first focus group. I analyzed the responses of the administrative focus group members based on the data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and subsequently drew conclusions about how their perceptions may influence plans for redesigned programs at the small high school, which is the focus of this study. Due to time constraints, and the

volume of data contained in the full HSSSE (2007) data set, I pre selected pages from the HSSSE (2007) data for the focus group to review. The pages from the HSSSE (2007) were selected for the following reasons. First, I wanted to maintain the themes of school climate, classroom engagement, school engagement, extracurricular activities, and relationships with administrators, teachers, staff, and other students as focal points in the group's discussion (HSSSE, 2007). Second, I prioritized questions contained in the HSSSE (2007) to reflect goals that the school district had already identified and begun to implement. Those goals included a district-wide restructuring plan to launch 21st century teaching and learning and the introduction of the Danielson Model (2007) to enhance professional development as a part of overall school reform efforts during 2007-2008.

To elicit the perceptions of administrators in the first focus group, the group members were asked to consider the following:

Research Question 1:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?

Additionally, the focus group was asked to consider questions 1, 2, and 3 from the interview guide for the first focus group. Those questions included:

1. What kinds of relationships do you see between student perceptions of school engagement and administrators' perceptions of student engagement?
2. How might the school utilize the data gathered to individualize opportunities for all students?
3. What do students indicate that they do to learn out of school that may enhance how they learn while in school?

Following a review of *Research Question 1* and *Interview Guide questions 1, 2, and 3,* I requested that the focus group review survey data on pages 13, 14, 15, and two questions at the top of page 16. The order of the questions contained in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), to which the focus group responded, are listed below and correspond to the order in which the group members chose to discuss them. The HSSSE (2007) questions included 7e, 7o, 7m, 7c, 7h, 7l, and 7b and related to students' classroom engagement, relationships with teachers and relationships with other students.

In response to question 7e (Table 1), which asked how often students had prepared a draft of a paper or

assignment before turning it in, the data revealed that 18.96% (*n* = 73) of students reported never preparing drafts of assignments. Additionally, 63.64% (*n* = 245) reported rarely or only sometimes preparing drafts of assignments before turning them in. In response to these data, Member 3 said, "Prepared a draft, you would assume that they would. You know, we are constantly on the kids to do this." Member 1 referred to the need to build foundation skills and the district's focus on building 21st century skills. For the purpose of this study, and in reference to this administrator's comments, 21st century skills refer to those mentioned in Chapter I including, creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness, and social responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005).

Member 1 cited responses to question 7o (Table 2) in which 28.53% of students reported that they had sometimes, and 62.93% of students reported that they had often taken a multiple-choice test created by their teacher. Member 1 used the word "disappointed" in reference to teachers taking the "easier way" to assess learning with paper-and-pencil tests. Member 1 also responded to data in question 7m (Table 3) that reported that 75.73% of students rarely

or sometimes work with other students on projects/assignments during or outside of class. Member 1 contrasted a need for more creativity and problem solving in the delivery of curriculum and negative parental responses to open-ended questions that do not have concrete answers.

An analysis of students' responses to questions 7e, 7o, and 7m raises issues of teachers' mastery. In view of research that has demonstrated that students in classrooms with high-mastery teachers (those who systematically teach and assess concepts) show high levels of self-regulated learning, task engagement, and strategy use (Meece, 1994) it is reasonable to consider what types of classrooms foster the use of internalized self-mastery strategies in students. Revising a paper may either be a result of an extrinsic demand (for example, as part of a class, grade or assignment) or a response to an internalized performance standard. In the latter case, the student must exercise self-regulated behaviors (a delay in gratification before an assignment is completed) and that student must be self-directed if the work is being done at home. Self-regulated and self-directed behaviors in students were influenced by the degree of motivation that a student feels in

approaching an assignment. Thus, a teacher who sets clear standards and goals, expects students to apply effort, teaches sequentially, and engages in ongoing assessments may produce a sense of efficacy and motivation in a student, which results in greater effort inside and outside of the classroom. Low-mastery teachers are those who rely on memorization and "recall of isolated facts and information" (Meece, 1994, p.36). The HSSSE (2007) data that resulted from questions 7e and 7o, point toward a possible relationship between a majority of students not exerting adequate effort on revising at-home assignments and their teachers' use of multiple-choice assessments in school, which rely on memorization rather than on an application of concepts. This relationship may need further investigation in relation to program redesign plans.

Redesigned school programs that effectively address previously taught students' learning strategies, such as writing revisions, must investigate when and where the pattern of not utilizing a particular strategy emerged. Additionally, it may be helpful to ask students whether their individual self-efficacy beliefs influence their study skills (Dweck, 1999). Member 1's comment that parents do not always support open-ended assignments suggests a

need to examine what kinds of parent education may best support program redesign efforts.

Question 7c (Table 4) shows that although 34.28% of students (*n = 133*) report that they talk to "your teacher" often (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007), 62.11% (*n = 241*) reported that they only talk to their teacher(s) sometimes or rarely. Question 7h (Table 5) shows that 25.91% (*n = 100*) report that they have often received helpful feedback from teachers on assignments or other class work (2007) and 50.26% (*n = 194*) say that teacher feedback occurs sometimes. However, Member 2 responded to the 23.84% (*n = 92*) students who reported that they rarely or never receive helpful feedback from their teachers with "surprise." Member 2 wondered if, in view of the relatively small class size in this small high school, a lack of teacher feedback was a frequent occurrence. Member 1 commented, "I have another question as you pose it. Are the teachers inviting that kind of dialogue?" Member 5 suggested that it was possible to figure out which students answered question 7h with an attitude of, "I am just going to answer it this way." Member 5 continued by saying, "But, there is nobody that I can think of in the high school who hasn't had a conversation with his or her teacher about

what happens in the classroom." Member 5 went on to say that due to the size of the high school, "we know our kids individually" and questioned what "talking to the teacher" meant in terms of how the question on the survey was posed to student respondents.

I observed that the discrepancy between student responses to questions 7c and 7h prompted Member 5 to question students' motivations to be truthful and the construction of survey questions that may have prompted different interpretations of meaning and inconsistent responses from students.

In Chapter II, Bandura's (1977) inclusion of teachers was cited as important contributors to student engagement and learning outcomes. He theorized that the degree to which a teacher exerts persistent effort in making academic curricular choices is dependent on the self-efficacy the teacher feels toward the level of task difficulty demanded by the curriculum. If a teacher does not have a broad and in-depth knowledge of the subject matter he/she is teaching, there may be a greater tendency for that teacher to utilize low-mastery assessments. In view of Bandura's (1977) assertions, the data gleaned from questions 7e, 7o, and 7m and the use of multiple-choice questions as

assessment tools needs to be considered on a district-wide basis. I observed that student responses to questions 7c and 7h indicated a need to investigate the impact of a relationship between teachers' reliance on multiple-choice assessments and the development of students' abilities to ask reflective questions and/or seek teacher feedback for clarification. Furthermore, teachers may feel less comfortable in the role of facilitators in constructivist classrooms than they do when curricula and assessment support the traditional role of teachers as experts. From a program improvement standpoint, administrators need to consider what might give cohesion to the development of effective grade-to-grade practices that encourage dialogue between students and teachers and are manageable within the constraints of the school's schedule and operation.

Question 7l (Table 6) asked students how often they have worked on a paper or project that required them to interact with people outside of school doing interviews, observations or other types of investigations (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Of the total number of students who responded ($n = 380$), 72.64% ($n = 276$) reported that they never or rarely participated in work that required involvement with people or situations outside of

school. Of the remaining students, 22.11% (*n* = *84*) reported sometimes working with people or situations outside of school and only 5.26% (*n* = *20*) reported that they have often worked on a paper or project that required out-of-school interactions. Member 8 suggested that these data might be skewed by the April 2007 administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007), which took place in advance of seniors' participation in community internships during May and June 2007. Member 2 pointed toward an experience interviewing community members in which high school students who had been in the district since second grade participated. Member 2 suggested that, in view of their second grade project, it was unclear if these high school student respondents were considering recent or long-term educational experiences when they answered question 71. Member 5 said that all ninth graders are required to "give a speech in their class" and said, "You wonder what they (students) are thinking."

Chapter II provides a discussion of experiential learning theories. Educational theories are not new and have been promulgated throughout the 20th century. Notably, as early as 1938, Dewey postulated that learning takes place in social contexts and that participation in concrete

activities stimulates and encourages the application of concepts that the learner is trying to grasp. Vygotsky, a pioneer of social constructivism, theorized that the cultural and social context in which a learner is embedded results in cognitive growth as a product of activities practiced in the environment in which an individual lives. Interactions within the social/cultural context, then, become catalysts for the development of higher order conceptual thinking (Vygotsky, 1962).

The historical basis for constructivist and experiential learning, and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills' (2005) identification of real world problem solving and the development of communication skills as key components in the preparation of 21st century workers, suggest that students are not currently being required to include community interactions into their assignments and projects with adequate frequency. Sharing the HSSSE (2007) data with teachers may stimulate a discussion about the possibility of increasing the integration of opportunities for students to interact with people and situations outside of school that require problem-solving and communication skills. Additionally, I suggested that the extent to which teachers are utilizing Internet-based Web 2.0 social

networking technologies to connect students with organizations and people around the globe should be considered as program redesign plans are formulated. In answer to question 7b (Table 7), 55.30% (*n = 214*) of students responded that they often ask or answer questions in class (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007), and 35.40% reported that they sometimes do. Only 9.30% of students answered that they never or rarely ask or answer questions during class. Member 8 made a distinction between class participation, frequently called on students, and those who often raise their hands. Member 3 remarked that the "numbers" for school climate and relationships look "really strong" and made a distinction between school and classroom engagement saying, "What are the questions that pull from and result in these percentages?"

Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) described students' sense of their classroom self-efficacy in terms of how students attribute academic outcomes to either ability or effort. Schunk and Zimmerman's research demonstrated that what students attributed to their academic success, however, was mediated by whether teachers presented process and goals; process, goals and product; or process, goals, product, and on-going feedback with opportunities for revision and

correction in the teaching curricula. The latter group, who received systematic instruction toward specific goals and products with ongoing feedback and encouragement for revision of their work, demonstrated higher levels of achievement than did the other three groups.

Therefore, it is possible that while hand-raising and asking questions represent aspects of students' classroom engagement, and may reflect comfort with classroom climate and relationships with teachers and peers, the frequency with which students raise their hands or answer questions does not necessarily indicate that students' achievement levels are being optimized. Optimal achievement would only occur if instruction engaged students and included process, goals, products, feedback and encouragement (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). This is important because student engagement is frequently a measure of teacher efficacy during administrative classroom evaluations. I recommend that teacher evaluations include student achievement criteria over time. Professional development efforts directed toward teacher efficacy also need to emphasize that the attributes of classroom climate and relationships may only significantly affect achievement if, coupled with

masterful pedagogy, significant changes in assessment results occur.

Vygotsky (1962) asserted that teaching is most effective when a group of students have their thinking made public through discussions that encourage and elucidate both the content of academic problems and issues encountered as part of the learning process. Students' abilities to ask reflective questions without embarrassment need to be nurtured through professional development that teaches teachers to use questioning strategies and that supports redesigned programs. Some of those strategies include guided peer-to-peer questioning, encouraging teachers to model learning processes, showing videotapes of other students grappling with problem solving, and having teachers play the role of moderator/scribe as students grapple with alternative solutions to complex problems (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). These strategies also align with 21st century teaching goals as outlined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005).

I requested that the group review data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) on pages 17, 19, 21, and 22. These pages included questions related to students' collaboration with peers from different

racial, ethnic, religious, and socio economic backgrounds and included 7u (Table 8), 7v (Table 9), 8i (Table 10), 11 (Table 11), 8m (Table 12), 8n (Table 13), 8p (Table 14), 15a (Table 15), 13 (Table 16), 15e (Table 17), 8o (Table 18), 8q (Table 19), and 8p (Table 20). These questions also related to students' effort, curiosity, and excitement about learning, motivation, and student perceptions of academic challenge.

I asked the focus group to consider questions 1, 2, and 3 from the interview guide for the first focus group as they responded to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) data. The interview guide questions included:

1. What kinds of relationships do you see between students' perceptions of school engagement and administrators' perceptions of student engagement?
2. How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to individualize opportunities for all students?
3. What do students indicate that they do to learn out of school that may enhance how they learn while in school?

The order of the questions contained in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to which the

focus group responded are listed below and correspond to the order in which the group members chose to discuss them. Student responses to questions 7u and 7v refer to the frequency with which students have had conversations and worked on projects with peers from different backgrounds.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)data revealed that over 79% of students reported that they sometimes or often have had school-related interactions with students who are racially, ethnically, religiously, or politically different from themselves, and/or peers whose values or socio-economic level differed from their own. Member 8 commented that the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) data reflected positively on the degree of comfort students feel with racial, social, and economic differences between themselves and their peers.

Member 8 referred to question 8i (Table 10) which showed approximately a 50/50 split between students who disagreed or strongly disagreed (*n = 192*) and those who agreed or strongly agreed (*n = 184*) that they had worked harder than they expected to in school (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Member 8 also referred to question 11 (Table 11) which showed that 51.60% of students

reported that they were academically challenged in one (1), two (2), or some of their classes, while 43.35% reported that most or all of their classes presented an academic challenge to them. Member 8 commented that conversations about levels of academic challenge happen more frequently with parents than with students. Member 8 related the aforementioned data to student motivation and said, "We say, well if you say you are not being challenged, how come you are only getting an 87?" If approximately 50% of students are not working as hard as they expected to in high school, and approximately 50% of students report that they are academically challenged in only one (1), two (2) or some classes, there may be a relationship between these two data sets that requires further investigation. If a student is not motivated, that lack may result from an intrinsic, extrinsic, or combined set of factors. If, for example, Member 8's note of a grade value of 87 points represented the result of maximum student effort, it would have a different meaning than if it resulted from low effort. Low effort may result from depressed self-expectations (intrinsically sourced) stemming from low self-efficacy beliefs (Dweck, 1999), or from low levels of teacher expectations or teacher mastery (extrinsically

sourced) (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). I suggest that student perceptions of challenge and effort, integrated into on going classroom assessments, should include perspectives from both students and their teachers.

Member 3 referred to question 8m (Table 12) which showed that 60.32% (*n = 225*) of student respondents reported that they agree or strongly agree that their schoolwork makes them curious to learn other things (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). These data contrast with 39.68% (*n = 148*) of student respondents who reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that schoolwork made them more curious to learn other things (HSSSE, 2007). Member 3 also referred to question 8n (Table 13), which asked students to respond to the statement *in general, I am excited about my classes* (2007). In response to question 8n, 63.66% (*n = 240*) students reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the aforementioned statement. On the other hand, 36% (*n = 137*) of the student respondents reported that they agree or strongly agree with the statement that, in general, they are excited by their classes (HSSSE, 2007).

Member 3 commented on the data for questions 8m and 8n by saying that student responses are "very depressing."

Member 3 also remarked on the lack of connection between schoolwork and student perceptions of, "What comes after." I observed that the data for questions 8m and 8n are proportionally similar. The percentage of students who agree or strongly agree that they are curious to learn other things is 60.32% for question 8m. The percentage of students (36.34%) who agree or strongly agree that they are excited about their classes is almost half of the number who reported being curious to learn other things. These percentages for students were followed with 39.68% reporting that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that schoolwork made them curious to learn other things and 63.66% reporting that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were excited about their classes. I wonder what those "other things" (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007) might be, if nearly double the numbers of students are curious to learn "other things" than are excited about their classes. An investigation into students' perceptions of curiosity and excitement about their classes might broaden an understanding of the HSSSE (2007) data. This type of investigation, conducted through direct conversations with student focus groups, would provide an opportunity to clarify what the HSSSE (2007)

data mean to students. Understanding students' needs would serve as an additional step in the program redesign process.

Member 2 referred to question 8p (Table 14), which asked students to respond to the statement, *I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school,* by remarking that if 64.98% (*n = 245*) agree or strongly agree with that statement "they must be seeing some connection." Member 2 also noted that it is possible that students who perceive a lack of academic challenge will also report that they are not excited about their classes. Member 3 remarked that students might interpret *excited about your classes* as meaning that they are excited to get up in the morning. Member 1 mentioned research "that says that curiosity disappears as they get older and come into high school." I noted that this comment was unsupported by any mention of a study or studies on diminishing curiosity in K-12 students. Citing the need for 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005) to include the preservation of curiosity as a basis for questioning and problem solving, Member 1 said, "The challenge is how we create an atmosphere where most teenagers are curious the way they are when they are 5 or 6 years old." I wonder what

influences or factors in the school studied herein may contribute to dampening students' curiosity.

Chapter II points toward the behavioral origins of motivation and curiosity. Skinner (1938) demonstrated that environmental manipulations could predict and control behavior. From a Skinnerian standpoint, for curiosity to develop, opportunities for students to investigate problems must exist, and teachers have to create a classroom environment in which investigation techniques are modeled, valued, and rewarded. Skinner's behavioral theories have resulted in behavioral conformity in schools. Bruner (1966) suggested that to understand complex bodies of knowledge, students need to understand component parts. Curriculum must be paced, and awards and punishments devised that affect learners should promote learning. Sizer and Sizer (1999) suggested that Skinner's behavioral approach and Bruner's constructivist legacy have resulted in high schools with policies that "run counter to the notion of individualized high standards" (p. 50).

Sizer and Sizer (1999) asserted that in the "blizzard" (p. 50) of curricular and extracurricular activities offered in schools, "There are kudos for those who appear to do the most. And, grades are given, but there is little

careful thought about the real and lasting quality of what has been accomplished, a fact that is readily understood by students" (p.50). Sizer and Sizer emphasized that students are taught to appear to be on top of things rather than being given real opportunities to master material. Furthermore, the Sizer and Sizer asserted that the development of curiosity runs counter to the realities of the standardized educational goals to which high schools currently adhere. The Sizer and Sizer's perspective may shed light on students' responses to questions related to curiosity and motivation that are contained in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). Sizer and Sizer's assertions support the need for redesigned programs that foster curiosity, develop individual talents, build students' strengths and encourage their interests.

Member 4 referred to question 15a (Table 15) in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007)which asked students to rate the degree to which their school emphasizes memorizing facts and figures in work for classes. Of the 373 students who responded to this question, 69.43% (*n = 259*) reported that the school places some or very much emphasis on memorization of facts and figures. Member 4 referred to question 13 (Table 16) which

asked students to identify the general number of classes students take in which they give their maximum effort (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Forty-one point eight percent (*n = 158*) of students reported that they give maximum effort to most or all of their classes. Fifty-seven percent (*n = 220*) of students reported that they give maximum effort to some, one (1) or two (2), or make no effort in their classes. Member 4 related the findings in questions 15a and 13 to the overuse of multiple-choice assessments and the need for the district to think about changing the way "we" think about teaching and learning.

These comments led to Member 2 drawing the group's attention to question 15e (Table 17) which asked students how much emphasis the school places on spending a lot of time to prepare for standardized tests (HSSSE, 2007). Thirty-five percent of students (*n = 129*) reported that there is *some* emphasis on spending a lot time to prepare for standardized tests, while 42.12% (*n = 155*) answered that the school spends *very much* time on test preparation. Member 4 responded to this data with the comment, "Almost 70% of them see school as memorizing facts and figures. I was nervous about that." Member 1 responded with the words "very scary." Member 1 pointed out that the most common

assessments given in the high school are multiple-choice tests. Member 4 remarked that students do not understand the relationship between memorization and the application of concepts as they are presented on tests. Member 1 remarked that students, beginning in 10th grade (when transcript concerns surface in preparation for college applications), and parents begin to strongly resist conceptual assessments that may negatively impact more direct means to attaining high grades. Member 1 said that "we are in the throes of change right now" and concluded that "the assessments have to look different."

The data analyzed from survey questions 15a, 13, and 15e point toward a need for teachers to help students apply concepts and feel more comfortable with risk-taking in complex, conceptual problem-solving tasks. Risk-taking involves three cognitive processes including the perception of the risk, an expectation of the outcome, and the degree to which one perceives oneself to be effective in achieving that outcome (Bandura, 1995). Dweck (1999) explored the relationship between a student's affective disposition and learning outcomes. Dweck described students as holding an *entity* learning theory if they believed that they had a predetermined and limited capacity for learning, and

holding an *incremental* learning theory if, through effort and personal volition, they believed that their capacity to learn could be extended. The implication is that students who are entity theorists believe they have a limited capacity to learn and therefore may be less engaged classroom learners than incremental theorists who believe that classroom engagement will increase their capacity to learn. Further, Dweck suggested that self-theories about learning capacity transcend ability levels. For example, students labeled gifted and who possess an *entity* self-theory may exhibit self-limiting learning behaviors.

Dweck's experiments on such students demonstrate that, for example, failure to attain a desired grade may encourage a belief that he or she has reached the maximum potential on his/her intelligence level with a resulting retraction from learning engagement (1999). For students with high expectations for school achievement, or those who have parents with high expectations for school achievement, tackling conceptual problems may incur a risk-adverse response. Therefore, I suggest that the introduction of conceptual problem solving in the early elementary grades and continuation through the upper elementary and middle school grades may help students whose self-efficacy beliefs

are weak to develop efficacy capacities early on. Parental education programming, with an emphasis on potential outcomes based on children's self-efficacy beliefs and self-regulation (ability to sustain motivation) may need to be included in redesigned program plans (Dweck, 1999; Stipek, 2004).

Responses to question 8o (Table 18) show that 73.99% (*n = 276*) of students agree or strongly agree that they value the rewards (grades, awards, etc.) that they get at school for their work (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Responses to question 8q (Table 19) show that 74.53% (*n = 269*) of students feel good about themselves as students. Member 9 commented, "We certainly have students who feel good about themselves." In view of the findings presented in Chapters IV and V, I recommend that students' self-perceptions and their efficacy beliefs, investigated further, may reveal that more students feel good about themselves than are making maximum effort or are feeling challenged by their schoolwork. Redesigned school programs in the high school that is the focus of this study, might include a professional development discussion with teachers about the concept of *academic press.* Academic press is a combination of rigorous curricula and high

expectations for learning without the performance pressures that undermine individual efficacy beliefs. As an effort-based motivational strategy, academic press has had a demonstrated positive impact on student achievement (Stipek, 2004).

Member 8 referred to question 8p (Table 20) which asked students to respond to the statement, *I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school* (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Sixty-five percent of students (*n = 145*) reported that they agree or strongly agree that they see how the work they are currently doing will help them after high school (HSSSE, 2007). Thirty-five percent (*n = 132*) of students reported that they disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that they see how the work they are doing in high school may help them in the future (HSSSE, 2007). Member 8 said, "I would be very interested in asking the same question in 4 years or 10 years, or 20 years." Member 8 continued, "This is the basic idea of education and very relevant to our 21st century view."

I observed Member 8's positive focus and noted that Member 8's comment reflects a focus on student responses to attribute-based questions. Attribute-based questions are

those that demonstrate strong efficacy responses from students who are more likely to believe that they possess the qualities necessary to succeed in reaching long-term goals (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994). Affirmative distal goal-orientations may reflect relevant perceptions (students who are actually able to perceive the value of a relationship between secondary education and advanced academic and career applications), stable performance expectations (students who believe that, based on their performance in high school, they will be able to succeed in careers), or may be based on high self-esteem. The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) data reveal some of the variables which impact the development of self-efficacy including attitudes toward school and the ability to formulate short-term and long-term goals. Also illuminated are connections between students' motivation and effort and students' perceived value of the education they are receiving. The complexity of student responses to educational climate and performance expectations, and how students express that complexity through the HSSSE (2007), requires further investigation. A further limitation in terms of assessing student perceptions of how helpful they feel their secondary education may be after they graduate

is that the HSSSE (2007) does not ask students about their perceptions of possible future outcomes based on international achievement levels for students of similar ages. Exposure to international studies on student achievement, notably the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2003), may provide an additional data source for teachers and students to use in conjunction with HSSSE (2007) data as program redesign plans progress.

I requested that the focus group review data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) on pages 34, 35, and 36. These pages included questions related to the manner in which the school contributed to growth in students' independent learning skills, awareness of conditions in the community outside of school, development of clear career goals, ability to solve real world problems, think critically, and work well with others. These same questions also related to factors that may contribute to boredom or excitement/engagement in school, and whether students feel they have the ability and skills necessary to complete their work (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Questions included 16h (Table 21), 16j (Table 22), 16k (Table 23), 16i (Table 24), 16g

(Table 25), and 16d (Table 26). Also covered in this section of the data analysis are questions 24 (Table 27) and 25 (Tables 28-33). Finally, questions addressed are 26a-i (Tables 33-42) and 8b (Table 43). The questions in this section of the data analysis appear in the order in which the focus group members chose to discuss them.

Member 3 referred to questions 16h, 16j, 16k, 16i, 16g, and 16d, and the large percentages of students (approximately 40-45% on all measures) that reported that students perceived the school had contributed a little or not at all to their growth as independent learners. Additional answers to these questions showed that students felt the school had contributed a little or not at all to their awareness of community conditions, development of their career goals, critical thinking, and abilities necessary to solve real world problems (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Member 4 responded that question 16g, which asked how school had contributed to growth in the area of working well with others (HSSSE, 2007) reported, "67% say they do." Member 3 replied, "I don't think that is good." Member 1 associated the above data with the cancellation of Junior/Senior Day (due to student misconduct), an event that students reported gave

them a chance to work together. The administrators laughed together at this point in the discussion.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) data on questions 16h, 16j, 16k, 16i, 16g, and 16d, asks the degree to which students feel the school has contributed to their growth in the areas of independent learning, community awareness, development of career goals, ability to solve real world problems, think critically, and work well with others. The questions mentioned above may be negatively correlated with the data from question 7l (Table 6). Question 7l shows that 72.64% (*n = 276*), of students reported that they have never or rarely worked on a paper or project that required them to interact with people outside the school in interviews, observations, and through other means (HSSSE, 2007). It is possible that the fewer the opportunities for students to interact outside of school, the greater the likelihood that students will report that school has not contributed to their growth in terms of independent learning, community awareness, real world experiences with problem solving, the development of clear career goals, and critical thinking. Since working well with others may take place inside or outside of school, it is not surprising that 67.94% (*n = 248*) of

students reported that they believe the school has contributed to growth in this area. In this case, there may be a positive relationship between student reports that they feel good about themselves as students (question 8q, Table 19), and additional HSSSE (2007) data that indicates a positive school climate and good relationships with teachers and peers, and students' perceptions that the school has contributed to their ability to work well with others.

The administrators' perceptions of the data obtained from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) suggest that the focus group participants perceived student responses to be inconsistent answers by students on questions that appeared to address similar topics. Additionally, administrators attributed students' responses as reflecting flaws that appear in "all surveys." The group identified their reasons for inconsistencies in the HSSSE (2007) data. These included too many questions, the month of administration, lack of adequate explanation, students' lack of understanding of the meaning of questions, small print, and difficulties for special education students. The administrators' perceptions indicated a lack of trust in the integrity of students'

feedback on their school experiences and a lack of understanding of how different questions on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) relate to one another. I observed that the presentation of the HSSSE (2007) data to the focus group and time constraints captured only initial reactions from the participants. Participants' reactions may or may not reflect more deep-seated mistrustful attitudes toward students. Therefore, the researcher recommends that discussions with these administrators continue following the conclusion of this study. Further discussions with the administrative focus groups would serve to clarify administrative perceptions of students based on the HSSSE (2007) data and identify which findings are most relevant to redesigning programs in this high school. Included in further discussions with administrators, in addition to the HSSSE (2007) data, should be the findings of this study and the full verbatim transcripts from the first and second focus group meetings. The transcripts would serve as a record of the discussions and allow for an expanded dialogue that would clarify directions for program redesign plans.

Focus group participants referred next to questions related to factors that may contribute to boredom,

excitement, or engagement in school (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Questions in this portion of the discussion included 16h (Table 21), questions 24 (Table 27) and 25 (Tables 28-33), and questions 26a-i (Tables 33-42). The questions are in the order in which the focus group chose to discuss them.

Question 24 asked students to respond to the question *Have you ever been bored in class in high school* (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Out of 373 student respondents, 66.22% (*n = 247*) reported that they have been bored every day or in every class. Question 25 (a drop-down menu of choices) related to reasons that students may be bored including, a lack of challenging work, work that is difficult, work that was not interesting, material that was not personally relevant, no interactions with the teacher, or other non specific reasons. Students reported the following percentages and reasons for boredom. Twenty-nine percent of students (*n = 115*) reported that the work was not challenging enough. Twenty-eight percent of students (*n = 111*) reported that they are bored because the work was too difficult. Seventy-nine percent of students (*n = 311*) reported that the work was not interesting. Thirty-eight percent of students (*n = 148*) reported that the

material was not personally relevant. Thirty percent of students reported (n=118) that they were bored because they had no interactions with the teachers, and 12.72% (*n = 50*) were bored for non specific reasons.

Member 3 responded to the aforementioned data with a whistle and said, "Yes, that is the cool thing, to be bored." Member 2 commented, "But, that is a lot of kids. You are talking about 70% on number 25." I observed that while the total number of student respondents to any given question in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) ranged from 348 to 393 students, all 393 students responded to question number 25 (Tables 28-33) which asked why they may have experienced boredom in school. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that 79.13% (*n = 311*) of students reported that they were bored because work was not interesting (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). These data might be viewed in relationship to question 7o (Table 2), in which 62.93% (*n = 236*) of students reported that teachers often give multiple-choice tests, and question 15e (Table 17), in which 77.17% (*n = 284*) of students reported that their school emphasizes preparation for standardized tests *some* (35.05%) or *very much* (42.12%). These data, when compared

to the data on the use of real world experiences as applications of content learning suggest that students may not simply be trying to appear "cool" but, instead, are accurately reflecting their perceptions of their learning experiences. This is particularly interesting in view of the data that emerged on what engages or excites them in school.

Questions 26a-i (Tables 33-42) asked students *what excites/engages you* (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007)? Choices for teaching modalities included teacher lectures, discussion and debate, individual reading, writing projects, research projects, group projects, presentations, role plays, and art and drama activities. Cumulatively, in the *some* or *very much* categories of student responses, 23.36% (*n = 85*) of students reported that they were excited or engaged by teacher lectures, 67.04% (*n = 242*) were excited or engaged by discussion and debate, 25.76% (*n = 93*) were excited or engaged by individual reading, and 25.56% (*n = 92*) of students were excited or engaged by writing projects. Additionally, in the *some* or *very much* categories of student responses, 33.70% (*n = 122*) reported that they were excited or engaged by research projects, 58.38% (*n = 209*)

were excited or engaged by group projects, and 41.73% (*n = 149*) were excited or engaged by presentations. Furthermore, in the *some* or *very much* categories of student responses, 40.11% (*n = 142*) reported that they were excited or engaged by role-plays, and 51.69% (*n = 184*) of students reported that they were engaged by art and drama activities.

The administrators voiced two different responses. Member 3 commented, "I want to know what excites them. Nothing. None of the choices excites them. Except, teacher lecture, some or very much." Member 2 said, "You are talking about 70% on (question) number 25. Why were you bored? The work wasn't challenging enough." Member 1 commented on students' positive response to discussion and debate as a classroom teaching strategy, and that this strategy often lacks content.

The social-cognitive perspective, discussed in Chapter II, is relevant to discussions of boredom, excitement about learning, and learning engagement that students experience in classrooms. Boredom is related to the level of interest that a student may have in both the content and outcomes he or she perceives are possible through personal volition (effort toward a goal) or chance (attributing a good grade to external factors such as a test being easy rather than

resulting from effort). From a social-cognitive perspective, a relationship exists between the ways in which students perceive school engagement and the degree to which they believe that competence is a self-regulatory mechanism (Zimmerman, 1989). Furthermore, social-cognitive theory suggests that whether a goal is learning-oriented (internal) or task-oriented (external) the degree to which a student feels intrinsically satisfied or dissatisfied, or seeks external validation for demonstrations of competency plays a role in the degree to which a student may report positive school engagement (Elliot & Dweck, 1988). For students to report that they were not bored meant that they were experiencing positive emotional responses to learning, such as excitement or pleasurable stimulation. Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) proposed that the emotional quality of interest-based activities requires a level of emotional arousal that is perceived as pleasant tension, which also indicates a match between an individual's perceived level of competence and the requirements of the task that is being attempted (Bandura, 1977). A sense that involvement in the activity is voluntary and therefore autonomous, and that meeting the expectations of others will result in some type of social reward (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1994) is also

important to students' perceptions of positive school engagement. Bandura (1977) and Schunk's (1994) theoretical framework is supported by Bruner (1996) who emphasized instruction that is concerned with experiences and contexts that make a student willing and able to learn (readiness).

Bruner recommended that concepts should spiral so that each level of instruction provides a foundation for the next level of advancement (scaffolding). Furthermore, Bruner posited that instruction should encourage conceptual thinking that inspires learners to explore ideas beyond the information given. Bruner believed that curricular content and skills, presented in an appropriate order and paced properly, enhances student engagement, which results in learning.

Bandura, Schunk, and Bruner validate my observations that student responses to questions about boredom, excitement, and engagement do not reflect a group of students who are not, or cannot become, engaged. Rather, students' responses reflect a diversity of abilities, learning styles, and affinities for different modalities that, integrated more effectively into classroom instruction, would increase student engagement. Student responses to questions about boredom, excitement, and

engagement are a call for curriculum differentiation. An investigation into what kinds of teaching strategies and ability groupings are currently used in secondary level classrooms in the high school in this study would be useful.

It is also interesting to note that the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) does not ask students about their perceptions of how well they think teachers use and integrate technology into curriculum. The integration of technology into curriculum needs to be investigated and discussed with students as a component in efforts to increase student engagement and redesign programs that more effectively incorporate 21stcentury skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005).

Member 8 referred to interview guide question 2 for the first focus group.

Interview Guide - Questions 2

2. How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to individualize opportunities for all students?

Member 8 suggested that a greater focus on students who have responded *sometimes* to questions on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) would

effectively generate an overall shift in students' attitudes toward learning and achievement. Member 8 said:

> That middle group and particularly the lower middle, those are the kids. So, maybe you take a handful of these questions, and you, you know this is anonymous, and you find a way to get real kid-by-kid responses. Maybe at the teacher level they can ask these exact same questions just within their classes and the data goes no further than that class.

Member 8 supported the need to focus on the middle strata of students by referring to question 8b (Table 43) that asked students to respond to the statement *I have the skills and ability to complete my work* (High School Survey of Student Engagement, 2007). Fifty-four percent of students (*n = 204*) agreed, and 39.73% (*n = 149*) strongly agreed that they have the skills and ability to complete their work. Only 5.86% (*n = 22*) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they have the skills and ability to complete their work. Member 8 was concerned with the 54.40% who believe they have the skills but did not answer strongly in the affirmative. Member 8 commented that students who disagreed with the above statement might be those who would answer negatively as a matter of course, and that high

ability students would do well anyway. The perception that high ability students do not have need of as much attention as other students requires examination and further discussion. Likewise, students who do not feel that they are well equipped with skills and ability must also have their needs addressed before they graduate from high school and move onto post secondary experiences.

Member 1 referred to Question 4 in the interview guide for the first focus group.

Interview Guide - Question 4

4. What are the most effective ways to share the data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with teachers?

Member 1's remarks covered the following points. First, teachers need to consider the diversity of students' learning needs in terms of the degree to which their daily lesson plans engage their students. Second, high school teachers have established a foundation of goodwill and trust in their relationships with students that may serve as a basis for more creative teaching. Third, teachers who have not moved beyond pre-Internet technologies need to do so in order to engage technologically literate students. Finally, teachers need to reflect on their practices in

terms of the future for which they are preparing their students.

Member 1 pointed toward the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) as a component in an overall district-wide dialogue that concerns strategic plans for 21st century school reform efforts that include redesigned programs.

Member 3 referred to Question 5 in the interview guide.

Interview Guide - Question 5

What are the most effective ways to share data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with parents and community members?

No focus group participants agreed that the data obtained from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) should be shared with parents or community members. Final comments by focus group participants included remarks by Member 2 that suggested that student responses demonstrated that 75% of students "think we are doing a good job and 25% do not." Member 1 observed that the proportionate breakdown suggested by Member 2 means that in any particular classroom, containing approximately 22 students, four or five students would be disengaged. Member 3 concluded with comments about the need for increased

curriculum differentiation. Member 3 noted the manner in which the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) compliments the Danielson model (Danielson, 2007), a framework for professional development and teaching, which is being implemented district-wide during the 2007-2008 academic years.

Summary of the analysis of the first focus group. First introduced in Chapter II, the work of social-cognitive theorists Bandura, Schunk, Zimmerman, and Meece support the findings in this study. Additionally, educational theorists including Bruner, Stipek, Dewey and Vytgosky provide a basis for understanding the importance of student engagement as a prerequisite for learning. The analysis of the administrators' perceptions, as seen in their responses to data in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), provides a guide to redesigning programs that meet the benchmarks set forth by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005). These benchmarks include critical and creative thinking, global awareness, communication skills, and technological literacy.

In the first focus group meeting, due to the volume of data on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) I directed the administrators' attention toward pre selected survey pages. The researcher distributed copies of the research and interview guide questions that corresponded with the content of the data. During the meeting, the administrators read the HSSSE (2007) data on the selected pages and shared their perceptions.

I observed that the administrators' responses to these questions matched four general themes. First, administrators registered emotional reactions that expressed surprise, disappointment, disbelief, and less frequently, gratification over the percentage of students who gave positive, negative, or neutral answers to specific questions. Second, based on students' responses, administrators questioned the internal validity, reliability, and construction of the survey instrument. Third, administrators questioned the integrity and seriousness with which the students responded to the survey. Fourth, the administrators framed questions that reflected their willingness to evaluate policies and practices that may have influenced students' responses.

Furthermore, I observed that administrators' perceptions of student responses to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) expressed surprised, disappointment, and skepticism. These reactions centered on weakened teacher efficacy and the use of traditional methodology and assessment procedures, as well as on students' inability to transfer learning between grades and subjects and to report their experiences accurately.

An examination of student responses to questions on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and the literature upon which this study rests, revealed that traditional assessment strategies, such as the frequent use of teacher-made multiple-choice tests, may depress students' efforts, dampen their motivation, and lower achievement levels at school and in assignments completed outside of school. Additionally, teacher feedback and student/teacher interactions need appraisal in terms of how effective these contacts are in generating curiosity and motivating learning that goes beyond standard curriculum. Teacher feedback also requires clarification in terms of how responses provide a means to encourage students to develop a sense of self-efficacy and the motivation necessary to improve their work. For example, if

teachers in the high school upon which this study is based provide alternate assessments (portfolios, exhibits, presentations, evaluations by outside experts, etc.), students may strengthen their understanding of the importance of growth in the areas of independent learning, community awareness, critical thinking, and working well with others. Students who are independent learners may also be more likely to develop the habits of lifelong learning, seek out opportunities to expand their knowledge, and be more motivated to develop personal growth practices. Students who have opportunities for varied evaluations have an increased chance of developing the tenacity necessary to meet international competition, now and in the future.

Furthermore, student responses to HSSSE (2007) revealed that the level to which students feel prepared for post-secondary experiences is reliant on the experiences they have during high school. In this high school, opportunities need to be increased for students to apply learning to real world problems and directly interact with people in their community.

The administrators in the focus group were aware that developing alternative teaching strategies requires change and that a greater degree of differentiation needs to be

integrated into content curricula. Differentiated classrooms enhance student engagement. That is why students' reports on what factors affect their feelings of boredom require examination. Optimum levels of engagement and achievement necessitate that curricular challenges and ability levels be matched. Furthermore, students raised using the Internet are exposed to vast amounts of information and require attention to issues of critical thinking, decision-making, and curricular relevance. The administrative focus group needs to work with teachers to determine how professional development initiatives will serve to increase students' exposure to real world experiences, to integrate technology, and to develop complex problem solving skills to enhance student engagement and achievement.

An auxiliary study focused on grade level item-analyses of student responses to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) by administrators, in conjunction with teachers and students may be the best next step at the conclusion of this study. The purposes of this study were to analyze administrators' perceptions of the student responses contained in HSSSE (2007) data and to utilize those means to gain insight into what may be most

effective in the redesign of high school programs. A follow-up study could focus on what may be most effective for each high school grade level.

The second focus group, which included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal, further investigated administrative perceptions based on data collected from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

An analysis of the second focus group. The second focus group discussion included the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal, both of whom are directly responsible for the initiation and implementation of curricular and extracurricular programs at the middle and secondary levels. These administrators also took part in the first focus group discussion. To ensure confidentiality and continuity in the second focus group, both participants utilized the same member numbers as they had in the first focus group meeting.

The discussion began with a review of the first two questions from the interview guide for the second focus group (Appendix C).

Interview Guide Questions 1 and 2 for the Second Focus Group

1. What kinds of programs might be developed based on data collected from the High School Survey for Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007)?

2. How might the school utilize data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to develop opportunities that enhance individualized learning?

I asked the administrators to comment on the impact that a small high school has on motivating students. Member 1 talked about a recent female student observed working at a diner the summer after she graduated. This recent graduate had been the president of her senior class, and neither the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal nor the director of guidance could remember who she was when they saw her at the diner. The assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal recalled not knowing who she was when she was in high school and commented on how particular students stand out while others do not. Member 1 commented, "I wonder if

we could have engaged her more. Maybe we didn't find her talent. Those are the questions I ask myself."

I asked Member 1 if the development of 21st century skills

(Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005), such as those necessary for interpersonal communication, were the type that may be salient to redesigned programs. Member 1 concluded, "We have to do more. I don't know the answer."

Member 8 suggested that a lack of interpersonal skills, such as the ability to conduct a conversation, receive an award with grace, and make eye contact are often evident when students are in middle school. Member 8 said that in view of the breadth of communication needed in the global workplace, "I think we need more adaptability in how we teach interpersonal skills."

Based on the aforementioned responses from the participating focus group administrators, two issues emerged that require further commentary. First, it is important to understand what a small high school provides in terms of relationships, climate, and learning benefits to students, as well as what may not be provided simply by virtue of small school size. Second, the importance of knowing students' strengths, interests, and talents and

their relationship to the development of effective programs that offer individualized opportunities must be recognized.

In Chapter I, a successful small high school was identified as one that meets criteria critical to student achievement. Those criteria included a strong vision for school improvement, leadership, high academic standards, a positive school climate, and family and community partnerships (The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001). Wasley (2002) stated that small high school effectiveness is based on the philosophical belief that all students can learn if given adequate attention.

Furthermore, for a small high school to be effective, the school's leadership must embrace emerging educational models that are focused on the development of student engagement and achievement (2002). The Small Schools Project (2005), funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2002), reported that small high schools are more successful than large ones because administrators have the autonomy necessary to shape school policy and engage in multiple forms of assessment to guide school improvement initiatives (The Small Schools Project, 2005).

Additionally, factors that have been identified as contributing to student achievement and the success of

small high schools include the impact of small school size on students developing positive attitudes toward academics, more consistent student attendance, and lower levels of truancy, discipline problems, violence, theft, substance abuse, and gang participation. Small high schools also report lower dropout rates, increased opportunities for faculty and students to develop personal relationships, high rates of parental involvement, better relationships between teachers and administrators, and stronger students' self-efficacy levels as learners (Cotton, 1996). Cotton supported Barker and Gump's (1964) study on school size that proposed that small schools provide benefits to students, teachers, and administrators in terms of enhanced personal relationships and higher quality curriculum. Cotton (1996) corroborated Barker and Gump's (1964) findings that demonstrated that school morale and opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities are greater in smaller school settings. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2002) linked small high schools to positive academic outcomes, improved test scores, and increases in college acceptances and post-secondary employment.

As measured against any of the factors that have been identified by the Small Schools Project (2005), Wasley (2002), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2002), Cotton (1996), and Barker and Gump (1964) as making small high schools effective, the small high school in this study largely provides an optimum environment for students. If that is the case, what contributed to the senior class president going unnoticed by the assistant superintendent of curriculum/high school principal and the director of guidance services?

The small high school in this study serves a population of 434 students, 350 of whom started high school together as 9th graders. Eighty-four new students joined the high school between 9th and 12th grades, over a four-year period. The overall stability of the student population district-wide and within the high school may positively contribute to positive student perceptions of school climate and relationships with adults and peers. On the other hand, it is possible that administrators and teachers identify students with specific roles or classify them in terms of their abilities in a manner that makes it difficult for students to redefine themselves as they move through the district. Students themselves may characterize

their own identities behaviorally and academically according to longstanding reputations that they carry with them or that they perceive to be self-defining.

Dweck (1999) a social-cognitive theorist introduced in Chapter II, supported the possibility that entrenched attitudes about students may become embedded into students' self-theories about themselves as learners within a relatively closed community. Dweck described students as holding an *entity* learning theory if they believed that they had a predetermined and limited capacity for learning, and holding an *incremental* learning theory if, through effort and personal volition, they believed that their capacity to learn could be extended. Dweck's research demonstrated that external influences, such as praise for abilities rather than effort, directly impacts how students perceive their efficacy as learners, and ultimately how students perceive their control over learning outcomes. Further, Dweck suggested that self-theories about learning capacity transcend ability levels. For example, students labeled gifted who possess an entity self-theory may exhibit self-limiting learning behaviors. Dweck's behavioral experiments on students demonstrate that, for example, failure to attain a desired grade may encourage a

belief that he/she has hit the ceiling on his/her intelligence level with a resulting retraction from learning engagement. In a school setting in which students see the same classmates over years, and teachers throughout the district know one another and discuss students, entrenched students' self-perceptions and their reputations as students, may influence students' achievement levels over time. More research is required to determine how intractable students' self-perceptions are in small school settings.

The degree to which administrators and teachers know every student in a small high school is not clear. In the first focus group, Member 5 suggested that due to the size of the high school, "we know our kids individually." In the second focus group, Member 1 recounted an incident in which Member 1 and Member 5 did not recognize a student who was a recent graduate and had been the president of her senior class. Sizer and Sizer (1999) suggested that for students to benefit from relationships with faculty, students must be known beyond just their names. Member 1 said, "We need to do more," in terms of providing talent development opportunities for all students. I suggest that the relationship between creating a means by which

administrators, faculty, and guidance staff may gain greater personal knowledge of individual students, and the implementation of a redesigned talent development program needs consideration.

I recommend that what teachers perceive to be positive qualities in students requires discussion, in relation to the positive and negative impacts of small school size. Furthermore, programs redesigned to focus on individualized talent development may allow for more flexible, authentic communication between faculty and students, and a chance for students to redefine and discover new roles as they mature.

The discussion continued with comments from Member 8. Member 8 said, "It is the old nature/nurture argument." Member 8 acknowledged that there are different ability levels in the area of communication and concluded that "we are in the business of nurture." Member 1 added that it is the school's responsibility to figure out how to develop students' talents whether they lie in the areas of creative writing or finance. Member 1 said, "It's thinking about the different things that kids need, giving them opportunities to explore, and then trying to match those up with what we know the 21st century skills should be."

I asked the second focus group participants to consider question 5 in the interview guide.

Interview Guide for the Second Focus Group - Question 5

5. What do you see as the relationship between student engagement, perceived teacher support, and the development of curriculum that directly affect student achievement?

I asked Member 1 if substantive school change is successful when one-on-one interactions between teachers and administrators foster trust. Member 1 recounted a story about a teacher who was willing to teach a new mathematics program when other teachers may have been reluctant to do so. Member 1 recalled how working one-on-one with this teacher modeled the mind-set and curricular aspects of program growth that served to influence other teachers. I continued to focus on *Interview Guide, Question 5* and asked if 21st century teachers need to establish relationships with students beyond their content areas. Member 1 reflected that teachers who have faced challenges as learners often have greater flexibility, creativity, and sensitivity in dealing with their students. Member 8 commented that teachers need "a certain amount of passion" and that they need to see their daily work as a career, not a job. Member 1 added, "When teachers and students have

this positive relationship, they are going to support each other."

As stated in Chapter II, a symbiotic relationship between teachers, students, and classroom environments as they exist within larger social contexts has a strong historical basis. Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1962) believed that social context, environment and student learning activities were integrated phenomena. While Vygotsky emphasized that social relationships promoted group learning, Dewey believed that social activity motivated individual volition. Therefore, the theoretical constructs that underlie student engagement stem from the emergence of interest in the dual development of social cognitive and behavioral learning. Cognitive and behavioral learning refers to the processes by which individuals construct their own learning. While Dewey (1938) theorized that communities of learners construct knowledge from contexts that are meaningful to them, Vygotsky (1962) pioneered social constructivism, a complex theory of education that included the learner's cultural context and cognitive growth as a product of activities practiced in social environments. Influenced by Dewey and Vygotsky, the work of Piaget (1971) initiated a shift in thinking about

how learning takes place from a teacher-driven construct to one that places focus on the learner. Skinner (1938) demonstrated that environmental manipulations could predict and control behavior. In terms of relationships between teachers (authority figures) and students (subordinates) it is probable to deduce that mutual respect is conducive to improved learning behaviors and outcomes. Bruner (1966), a major proponent of constructivist theory, proposed that learning is an active, social process in which current or past knowledge builds new conceptual understandings. From Bruner's perspective, a positive school climate and affirmative relationships between teachers and students support productive learning activities.

In Chapter I, Sizer and Sizer (1999) echoed the importance of students' active involvement in guiding educational outcomes and students' participation in structuring school experiences. Sizer and Sizer hypothesized that "a community's functioning rests on trust, and trust comes from the understanding that emerges from dialogue" (p. 17). Sizer and Sizer posited that trust emphasizes a mutual process based on communication between students and adults. Dialogues about trust ought to center on what should happen in schools and how schools model the

processes inherent in all viable, successful community organizations.

In Chapter I, Alison Cook-Sather pointed toward students' trust in adult leadership and perceptions of educators as important factors in how student engagement fosters the development of both student self-efficacy and the development of supportive educational policies (Cook-Sather, 2002). Cook-Sather cited "a basic lack of trust in students" (p. 4), that has evolved in American high schools and that continues to treat students as "recipients of what others determine is education," (p. 4), as potentially mutable factors that deserve administrative attention (Cook-Sather, 2002).

There is a historic, theoretical, and research basis to Member 1's contention that positive relationships between teachers and students are beneficial to both parties. The degree to which optimism and encouragement produces higher levels of student achievement requires further investigation. An optimistic and encouraging stance on the part of a teacher may be communicated through different personality styles, varied expectations for thresholds of student achievement, and impacts students

according to their ingrained self-theories as learners and sense of competency in different content areas.

In view of the research cited herein, administrators in the high school in this study should consider working with teachers and guidance counselors to communicate with students the differences between individualistic and collectivist decisions about how to best develop oneself and serve society. An individualistic focus on talent development is based on self-interests and personal potential, and tends to be reliant on past performances. A collectivist approach, in which an individual chooses a profession according to social needs rather than by self-interest, requires sensitivity to an entire social network (Bandura, 1999). As discussed in Chapter II, the differences between an individualistic approach and a collective one are reminiscent of the tension between Dewey's (1938) constructivist theories and Vytgosky's (1962) theories of learners embedded within social contexts.

I referred to question 3 in the interview guide. *Interview Guide for the Second Focus Group - Question 3*

How might academic rigor be increased based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007)?

Member 8 commented on question 24 (Table 27) in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007), which asked students to respond to the question *Have you ever been bored in class in high school?* Member 8 suggested that intellectual challenge forces students toward whatever tool a teacher decides to utilize. Member 8 said, "So, what we are really talking about is learning the language of the boredom?" Member 8 pointed toward the purpose of discovering the students' perceptions of what they find boring as being "communication keys" which are different for each student. Member 8 concluded by saying, "This is an ongoing process."

Member 1 related students' perceptions of boredom to the need for teachers to become reflective practitioners. Member 1 said, "Some teachers don't reflect on their practice and ask, "Is this difficult enough?" Member 1 also suggested that teachers should consider whether the questions they pose to students are challenging, whether questions or tasks are adequately open-ended, and whether there was latitude for creativity in students' assignments.

The issues inherent in students' reporting on boredom in questions 24 (Table 27) and 25 (Tables 28-33) are discussed at length in the data analyzed from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) for the first focus group. In addition, students' and administrators' perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching modalities that excite and engage students in the presentation of curricula were discussed in the analysis of questions 26a-i (Tables 33-42) (HSSSE, 2007), for the first focus group. Based on the comments of Member 1 and Member 8 in the second focus group, which suggest that teachers should reflect on their practices and attempt to understand what students mean by boredom, I recommend that the data from questions 24 (Table 27), 25 (Tables 28-33), and 26a-i (Tables 33-42) be shared with teachers. Furthermore, I recommend that students be included in discussions with administrators and teachers to clarify meanings and participate in the preliminary development of redesigned programs.

As was discussed in Chapter I, traditionally, "Students, who are at the center of the high school experience, are often at the periphery of discussions regarding changing their schools" (Shannon & Blysma, 2006,

p. 28). To be effective, schools need to gather data on student engagement and include students in a dialogue about how to develop relevant programs that respond to an individual student's unique talents and interests. Organizational structures that enhance meaningful relationships between students, teachers, and school practices may also "provide a key to improving student learning" (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2001, p. 3). At a time when there is much discussion about a stalemate in secondary school reform, activating student voice (Mitra, 2004) to engage students and teachers in a process in which they "co-create the path of reform" (p. 654) may serve to enhance students' developmental growth and increase their personal investment in their educational journey now and in the future.

The focus group participants considered question 4 from the interview guide for the second focus group.

Interview Guide for the Second Focus Group - Question 4

What kinds of programs might enhance student preparedness for the 21st century workplace based on the learning objectives outlined by the Partnership for 21st Century

Skills (2005) including technological literacy, cultural literacy, global awareness and communication skills?

I asked the focus group members whether it is possible to redesign programs to include opportunities for students to develop the 21st century skills listed in interview guide, question 4 considering the volume of content required to meet No Child Left Behind mandates. Additionally, I asked the discussion participants to talk about what the small high school upon which this study is based might "look like" in 2, 4 or 6 years time.

Member 8 responded that student success, in terms of future goals, requires that students feel that "the school and the people in it care about them and relate to them." Furthermore, that staff members have to "value that connection and value the impact that they have on kids." Member 1 added that in 2 years it is important "that [the] middle group of kids has become more of an active participant in our school." Member 1 referred to the importance of integrating students who come from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances into the life of the school.

In Chapter I, Finn's (1989) taxonomy of student engagement was presented. This taxonomy focused on

participatory behaviors that positively affect student achievement. Finn found a positive relationship between students' participation in extracurricular activities, which foster a sense of belonging, and school achievement. Finn (1998) broadened the scope of his definition and stated that, "A primary objective of instructional practice should focus on student engagement" (Finn, 1998, p. 1). Finn (1998) posited that the salient in-school behavioral components of student engagement are class participation, following school rules, being on time for classes, attention to the teacher, and responding to teacher-initiated directions and questions. Further, he asserted that the affective components of in-school engagement include a student's feeling of belonging at school, valuing the outcomes of an education, and a desire to seek a post-secondary education.

Skinner and Belmont (1993) also presented a behavioral theory of student engagement that included the learners' intrinsically motivated actions and affective state during learning activities (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Finn (1989, 1998)and Skinner and Belmont (1993) all integrated intrinsic and extrinsic behaviors as interdependent mechanisms that motivate or suppress student effort.

As was previously stated, approximately 350 out of 434 students in the high school that is the focus of this study entered ninth grade as a cohort directly from the middle school in this district. Therefore, it is possible to see why Member 1 raised the concern that the integration of students from different backgrounds and circumstances needs to be a goal. I recommend that, for example, data on curricular and extracurricular involvements for students who enter this school district between 9th and 12th grades be gathered and reviewed. These data may provide information that will be useful in assessing the needs of those newer students as redesigned program plans are developed.

Member 1 referred to a copy of the research questions and referenced the second question. Member 1 related research question 2 to question 4 from the interview guide for the second focus group.

Research Question 2

How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by redesign committee?

Interview Guide for the Second Focus Group - Question 4

What kinds of programs might enhance student preparedness for the 21st century workplace based on the learning

objectives outlined by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005) including technological literacy, cultural literacy, global awareness and communication skills?

Member 1 discussed the need for the small high school upon which this study is based to evolve toward individualized options that free students from a one-size-fits-all high school experience. In particular, Member 1 said, "I think that there should be a three-year high school or a five-year school" depending on the needs and interests of individual students. Additionally, Member 1 suggested that optional fourth year experiences may include real world externships for students whose maturity and learning needs would benefit from this approach to gaining credit for advanced secondary-level coursework. Member 1 noted that an impediment to school reform that involves alternative routes toward graduation come from parents who think, "It's a great idea, but wait until my kid gets into Harvard." Member 1 noted that the Partnership for 21stCentury Skills (2005) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2002) advocate flexible approaches toward the length of time different students spend in high school, as well as integrating options for alternative routes to earning coursework credits.

Member 1 and Member 8 agreed that hiring new teachers who demonstrate a "personal approach" and "flexibility" toward students and new curricula are important components in driving school reform efforts toward systemic shifts that accommodate redesigned programs. The administrators identified technological expertise and life experience in the real world as two prerequisites for new teachers who might be best suited to moving a 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005) agenda forward.

The discussion concluded with suggestions by Member 1 and Member 8 as to how to present the data gleaned on the High School Survey for Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to the faculty.

Chapter I included a discussion of the manner in which theoretical frameworks on student engagement include the examination of school structures and relationships that support students' social/emotional growth and reinforce students' achievement goals (Stipek, 2004). Goal orientations, which serve to motivate student engagement, also reinforce successful student-oriented learning patterns and practices that, if established in high school, may positively influence post-secondary educational

outcomes and future work experiences (Shannon & Blysma, 2006). To prepare students to compete in a global economy, it is important that they have experiences in high school that allow for the development of skills and applications that require higher order thinking and complex problem-solving in real world settings (Friedman, 2005). For these reasons, in the small high school in this study, systemic changes to the structural framework, delivery of content, and opportunities for students to interact with people and situations in the real world need to be considered as plans to redesign programs evolve.

Conclusions. The purpose of this study was to assess administrators' perceptions of students' responses given on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007). Student perceptions served as a basis for administrators to consider redesign plans for a successful small high school. The study used quantitative data to assess student engagement and qualitative research methods to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?

2. How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?

3. How might data on student engagement inform the development of school programs redesigned to help students' gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness and social responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005)?

Administrators in a successful small high school were interviewed in two focus groups in order to address these research questions. The first focus group was comprised of seven district-wide administrators including the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal, the assistant superintendent for finance, the director of special services, the director of guidance services, the middle school principal, an elementary school principal for grades two through four, and an elementary principal for kindergarten and first grade. The second focus group included two district administrators, the assistant superintendent for curriculum/high school principal and the middle school principal, both of whom are directly responsible for implementing programs on the middle and high school levels.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between high school students' perceptions of school experiences and the perceptions of the administrators of their school?

Administrators in the first focus group expressed surprise, disappointment, and optimism as they reviewed students' responses to the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). I noted that administrators in the first focus group also expressed distrust of the truthfulness of student responses. Doubts about the truthfulness of student answers to HSSSE (2007) questions were manifest in administrators' comments about students wishing to appear "cool," not understanding questions, or students misinterpreting questions. Several administrators also questioned the validity and reliability of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

Administrators in the second focus group, who had participated in the first focus group, took a philosophical and practical approach as they responded to HSSSE (2007) data and interview guide questions. The second focus group's approach focused on generating questions from the data and problem-solving based on successful past experiences in school reform implementation. The researcher

observed the administrators in both focus groups grappling with challenges and considering ideas that may serve to shape the short and long-term vision, goals, and direction of the small high school upon which this study is based.

Although not included in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) data set utilized in this study, a set of students' written comments, subsequently submitted to the researcher by the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy at the University of Indiana after the completion of the focus group interviews, requires comment. All respondents to the HSSSE (2007) were given an opportunity to add written comments at the bottom of the final page. Of the 393 student respondents to the HSSSE (2007) 78 students (20% of the total number of HSSSE, 2007 respondents, $n = 393$) wrote comments. Of the 78 students who wrote comments, all but three were critical of the high school upon which this case study is based. A majority of comments included expletives, which were replaced with asterisks by HSSSE (2007) analysts at the University of Indiana, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, in Bloomington, Indiana. I noted the aggressive nature of these students' comments and the inappropriate manner in which they expressed themselves to adults in authority. I

also noted that these students, whose opinions were solicited through HSSSE (2007) were anonymous in their comments, which may have freed them to express frustration that they might not otherwise have known how to vent. I recommend that the members of the administrative focus group review these comments. Furthermore, it may be timely and advisable to remind students of the avenues that exist for communication with adults when students need to reflect on or discuss their school experiences.

Because of the data on the High School Survey for Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and the subsequently submitted written comments by students, I suggest that perceptual differences between administrative viewpoints and those of students require investigation to clarify the meaning of gaps in understanding between these stakeholders as a preliminary step toward the development of program redesign plans.

Research Question 2

How might data on student engagement inform the redesign of a small high school by a redesign committee?

Administrative participants in both the first and second focus groups agreed that the data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) provided

valuable insights into high school students' perceptions and engagement levels. In particular, the use of multiple-choice assessments, a dearth of exposure to real world interactions and problem solving, reports of pervasive student boredom, and a lack of excitement and motivation about learning from a majority of students require further investigation. Administrators in the focus groups agreed that student reports on positive school climate and robust relationships with administrators, teachers, staff and peers provide a strong foundation from which to explore new directions for redesigned programs. Furthermore, they noted that these programs should integrate 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005) such as technological literacy, communication skills, creativity, critical thinking, and global awareness.

Member 8, in the second focus group, identified the following conditions including a call for teachers to consider the diversity of students' learning needs in terms of the degree to which their daily lesson plans engage their students. Second, high school teachers have established a foundation of goodwill and trust in their relationships with students that may serve as a basis for more creative teaching. Third, teachers who have not moved

beyond pre-Internet technologies need to do so in order to engage technologically literate students. Finally, teachers need to reflect on their practices in terms of the future for which they are preparing their students.

Research Question 3

How might data on student engagement inform the development of school programs redesigned to help students gain 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, leadership, personal productivity, self-direction, global awareness and social responsibility? (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005).

Administrators in the second focus group explored Research Question 3 in greater depth than did the participants in the first focus group. Based on data collected from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) the second focus group members identified seven areas of interest that may form a basis for the development of redesigned programs that address the needs of 21st century students. Those areas included the implementation of effective talent-development programs that enhance knowledge of individual students and increased opportunities for students to learn and practice communication skills. Additionally, the importance of

working directly with teachers to encourage the integration of new curricula and differentiated strategies in classrooms requires attention through professional development channels. Also identified as an area of interest in the development of redesigned high school programs was the need for administrators and teachers to talk to students and acquire a more detailed understanding of students' perceptions of what bores, excites and/or motivates their learning. The second focus group also identified the need for teachers to reflect on their practices and value the impact and influence of teachers' relationships with young people. Additionally, the second focus group emphasized the importance of flexible and personal approaches to altering the number of years students with differing maturity levels and interests need to spend in high school. Finally, the administrators talked about hiring teachers whose varied backgrounds would provide a foundation for inspiring students and the need for teachers to share in discussions centered on the HSSSE (2007) data.

Based on the focus group discussions, and to address the areas of concern identified by the administrators, the researcher concluded that systemic changes, such as the

implementation of block scheduling, may be advisable in advance of large-scale reforms in the school calendar. Block scheduling would accommodate project-based learning, a key component in programs that address the development of 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005). In addition, block scheduling may accommodate professional development activities, such as collegial observations and discussion amongst teachers, allow for in-depth coursework with hands-on applications, provide a timeframe conducive to community-based projects, and provide opportunities for teachers to identify and develop students' talents.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. I recommend that a study, conducted in collaboration with the developers of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) at the University of Indiana, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, in Bloomington, Indiana, explore comparative case studies on small high schools with similar demographic data as the high school that is the focus of this study.

2. I recommend that a study, conducted in collaboration with the developers of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007) at the University of Indiana, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, in Bloomington, Indiana, explore student engagement and students' perceptions of the use, integration, and application of technology in classrooms.

3. I recommend the implementation of a quantitative study that compares data analyzed from the entire population of students who have completed the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) and the data collected from the responses from students in the high school that is the focus of this study.

4. I recommend a mixed methodology study be undertaken. This study would focus on the collection of quantitative data gleaned from the 10 highest performing high schools in the United States as measured by standardized test scores, rates of post secondary college acceptances, college completion, truancy and dropout data, and qualitative data based on the impacts, effectiveness, and direction of program redesign and development efforts in those schools. In particular, questions regarding how top-performing

schools are addressing the integration of 21st century skills into their curricula and extracurricular programs would be of interest.

5. As a follow-up to recommendation number four, I suggest that a comparative study follow the aforementioned case study to compare findings from the 10 top-performing high schools with the high school that is the focus of this study.

6. I recommend an expansion of the study included herein to glean qualitative data, collected in focus groups comprised of teachers, based on the quantitative data collected in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

7. I recommend an expansion of the study included herein that analyzes qualitative data collected in focus groups comprised of students that is based on research questions designed to clarify the content and responses students gave on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

Recommendations for Practice

1. Through the K-12 restructuring process that is currently underway in the district that contains the high school in this study, administrators, teachers, parents and community stakeholders need to define and disseminate the educational vision, goals, and objectives called for by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2005). Furthermore, administrators and faculty need to define and disseminate a profile of the qualities, skills and experiences they believe define the ideal 21st century student.
2. Administrators need to communicate to teachers the perceptions and resulting questions generated through their participation in this study and any additional insights they have developed based on student responses on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007). Administrative perceptions and social cognitive research that underlie the Danielson model (2007), a professional development program which is being implemented as a teacher evaluation tool and framework for improving teachers' practices, needs to be incorporated into professional development discussions.

3. The Professional Development Committee needs to investigate the frequency with which teacher-made multiple-choice tests are used instead of applications that require critical thinking to assess students' understanding of how factual content relates to conceptual applications. The administrators need to provide professional development for teachers who require support in the development of alternative assessment tools.
4. The Professional Development Committee should pilot a program to utilize technology to establish on going classroom assessments to determine levels of challenge and effort on the part of students. A pilot program in major content areas that employs electronic student response devices to evaluate student understanding may be helpful.
5. The Professional Development Committee needs to assess the frequency with which teachers are using handouts downloaded from the Internet, from workbooks, and from textbook publishers. The Professional Development Committee should work with departmental teams to support teachers as they integrate curricula with project-based learning activities that incorporate problem solving,

integrate technology, include critical thinking, and require students to engage in community interactions and challenge themselves with real world applications.

6. The Professional Development Committee needs to recommend that teachers differentiate homework assignments to move students toward higher order thinking skills, concept applications and real world problem-solving.
7. Administrators need to disseminate information on student perceptions of positive school climate and relationships with staff, teachers and peers as a springboard to motivate both faculty and students.

Recommendations for Policy

1. I recommend that the Professional Development Committee implement departmental or interdepartmental discussion groups to review the data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

2. I recommend the administration, in coordination with the faculty and/or guidance department, facilitate discussions with students to clarify the meaning of student

responses to data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007).

3. I recommend the design and implementation of a job-embedded professional development program (ongoing, on-site professional development training, collegial observation and discussion) that focuses on collegial sharing and discussion regarding the integration of 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005). The focus of a job-embedded professional development program would provide opportunities for administrators and faculty to observe practices and assess the efficacy of strategies that are integrated into curricula, promote differentiation strategies, and best practices that are intended to increase student engagement and student achievement at the secondary level and throughout the district.

4. I recommend that a program redesign committee be formed to assess the effectiveness of current high school programs, identify how current programs already promote 21st century skills (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2005), and identify possible directions for the redesign of secondary programs. Additionally, a program redesign committee may serve to identify new directions for

program development that provide increased opportunities for the application of 21st century skills.

5. I recommend the presentation of current research to faculty in workshops that take place on Superintendent's Conference Days. The workshops would support the implementation of the Danielson model (Danielson, 2007) and future school initiatives. These workshops would also provide teachers with insights into how and why students may or may not be engaged as learners. These workshops would include the presentation of current research on self-regulation, self-efficacy beliefs, competency beliefs, effort, motivation and emerging fields in education including brain-based learning.

6. I recommend that the middle school project-based learning program for grades 7 and 8 extend to include the ninth grade as part of the public speaking program already underway for ninth graders.

7. I recommend that the high school's current project-based Independent Learner Program (ILP) for grades nine through 12 become more closely integrated and aligned with the guidance department with articulated mutual goals and objectives.

8. Finally, I recommend the adoption of block scheduling, as well as other creative scheduling options at the middle and high school levels.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Form

Research Affiliation: This research project is part of dissertation research at Seton Hall University in the Executive Education Doctorate program within the Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. The title of the dissertation is *A Case Study: An Assessment of Student Engagement as a Basis for the Redesign of a Small High School.*

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to utilize a focus group, comprised of school administrators, to examine and compare their perceptions of student engagement with previously collected data gleaned from their district's administration of the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) in 2007. This study will provide these administrators with an in-depth qualitative analysis, based on HSSSE data, as they develop a redesign plan for their high school. This qualitative component may serve to assist administrators as they seek to better prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities and the global workplace. Redesign plans developed through this study may serve as a redesign model for other small high schools in the future.

Procedures: There will be one focus group, comprised of administrators, which will meet twice. The focus group meetings will take place during regularly scheduled administrative meeting times to ensure convenience for all participants. Arrangements and logistics relevant to the implementation of this study will be the responsibility of the researcher. The focus group discussions, conducted by the researcher, will revolve around questions presented in an interview guide. A Jury of Experts reviewed and approved the interview guide. To avoid any loss of detail as the focus group proceeds, and as an aid to the principal investigator who will conduct the focus group without assistance, the discussions will be audio taped on an Olympus WS-100 64MB Portable Digital Voice Recorder.

Instrumentation: In advance of the first focus group meeting, participants will receive copies of the analysis of the HSSSE data prepared by the survey development researchers at the University of Indiana's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy. In the focus group meetings, the researcher will use an interview guide, descriptive questions and open-ended interview questions to elicit responses to data gleaned from the administration of the HSSSE in 2007. For example, interview guide questions will ask what administrator's see in terms of relationships between their perceptions of student engagement and what students report about their experiences at school. Furthermore, the researcher will ask administrators to share their perceptions of how these relationships may serve as components in the redesign of programs and courses in the high school that is the basis for this study. The principal investigator will conclude with closed questions to increase the probability that, in the future, community stakeholders may share in any outlines for redesign plans developed in the focus group interviews.

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Voluntary Nature of the Project: By signing the Informed Consent Form and attending the focus group discussions, respondents are consenting to participate in this study. Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of any kind.

Anonymity: The researcher will not to link participant's identities to any data collected. During the focus group meetings, the researcher will identify participants with numbers on tent cards in front of them. No names will be included in any work product or transcripts. Only the researcher will analyze the data and any results included in the dissertation will not reference participants or their school. Please be aware that the effort of the researcher to maintain the anonymity of the participants does not guarantee that group members will not reveal their identities, even if doing so is inadvertent. To minimize the chance that that any participant's identity is revealed, the researcher requests that all focus group participants maintain the anonymity of the group by keeping confidential both who is present and what is said.

Security of Stored Data: The researcher will transcribe the audio recordings and they will remain in the possession of the researcher. The data on the taped audio recordings and all data in written transcriptions of the focus group interviews will remain secure in a locked safe at the researcher's residence. No one else will have access to the data. The researcher will keep all responses and information under lock and key and destroy them after three years.

Confidentiality of Records: The researcher will not share the content of the focus group with anyone outside of the focus group. The researcher requests that participants join in maintaining the confidentiality of the group. The researcher's dissertation may include individual responses to interview questions, however, no mention of any subject's name, name of school, principal, superintendent, or district will be included therein. Furthermore, signed copies of this Letter of Consent, audio tapes and transcriptions of those tapes, will be stored in a safe at the researcher's residence. The researcher will have sole access to the safe. In three years, the Informed Consent Forms and all data and will be destroyed. Furthermore, the researcher is aware of the confidentiality rules regarding participant's rights.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks or discomforts in this research.

Benefits to Participants: There are no benefits in this study, monetary or of any other nature to the participants.

Remuneration: Participants in this study will not receive payment or any other type of remuneration.

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Description of Compensation/Medical Treatments for Injured Participants: No risk of injury exists for participating in this research study.

Alternative Procedures for Treatment of Injured Participants: No risk of injury exists for participating in this research study.

Contact Information: Potential participants with questions regarding this research or requests for information regarding research subjects' rights should contact Valerie Feit, Rye Neck High School, 300 Hornidge Road, Mamaroneck, New York, 10543. Valerie Feit's phone number is (845) 625-3238. Alternatively, contact her by email at, vfeit@ryeneck.k12.ny.us or, valfeit@aol.com Valerie Feit's faculty advisor, Anthony J. Colella, Ph.D., is available at Seton Hall University, Room 406-Jubilee Hall, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by phone at (973) 761-9397. Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D., Director of the Institutional Review Board, is available at the Office of Institutional Review Board at Seton Hall University, Presidents Hall, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, or by phone at (973) 313-6314.

Permission to Use a Digital Audio Voice Recorder: Please be informed that a digital audio voice recorder will capture all comments, opinions, and ideas from the focus group that may be vital and add substance to this study. On the audio tapes, an assigned number will refer to participants. Participants have the right to review or request the destruction of all or any portion of the taped sessions. The researcher will be solely responsible for transcribing the audio tapes made in the focus group session. A locked safe at the researcher's residence will store audio tapes and transcripts of the focus group discussions. The researcher has sole access to this safe. Destruction of all data will take place in three years.

Acknowledgement of Informed Consent Form: I have read the material above and I agree to participate in this study. I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this Informed Consent Form.

NAME_____

DATE_____

APPENDIX B
Adminstrators' Meeting Handout

Adminstrator's Meeting
August 21, 2007
HSSSE Focus Group - #1

Agenda:

- Introduction
- Focus Group procedures
- Overview of HSSSE survey and data
- Discussion

The High School Survey of Student Engagement:

- University of Indiana –Ethan Yazzi-Mintz, Ph.D.
- High school level, since 2004 – over 200,000 student participants
- Nationally comparative data is forthcoming

Student Engagement – A comprehensive view
Motivation and Relevance

- School climate
- Daily life activities (from eating breakfast to time on the phone with friends)
- Extracurricular activities and homework
- School engagement
- Classroom engagement
- Relationships (administrators, teachers, staff and students)

RN HSSSE DATA - SAMPLE

School climate

- 89% report feeling safe at school

Life activities

- 81% report that exercise is very important or a top priority

School engagement

- 68% report that they are engaged in school
- 69% report that they have a voice in school and classroom decisions

Classroom engagement

- 77% report that they are academically challenged

Relationships

- 89% report that an adult at school cares about them

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Interview Guide Questions - First Meeting

1. What kinds of relationship do you see between student perceptions of school engagement and administrators' perceptions of student engagement?
2. How might the school utilize the data gathered in the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE, 2007) to individualize opportunities for all students?
3. What do students indicate that they do to learn out of school that may enhance how they learn while in school?
4. What are the most effective ways to share the data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with teachers?
5. What are the most effective ways to share data collected in the HSSSE (2007) with parents and community members?

Interview Guide Questions - Second Meeting

1. What kinds of programs might be developed based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Achievement (HSSSE, 2007)?

2. How might the school utilize data collected on the High School Survey of Student Achievement (HSSSE, 2007) to develop opportunities that enhance individualized learning?

3. How might academic rigor be increased based on data collected on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (2007)?

4. What kinds of programs might enhance student preparedness for the 21stcentury workplace based on the learning objectives outlined by the Partnership for 21stCentury Skills (2005) including technological literacy, cultural literacy, global awareness and communication skills?

5. What do you see as the relationship between student engagement, perceived teacher support and the development of curriculum that directly affect student achievement?

APPENDIX D

High School Survey of Student Engagement Data (2007)

[redacted]

HSSSE 2007 Frequencies

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
1. What grade are you currently in?		
9th Grade	106	27.39
10th Grade	110	28.42
11th Grade	93	24.03
12th Grade	78	20.16
Total	**387**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
2. In what grade did you start attending THIS high school?		
9th Grade	347	94.04
10th Grade	14	3.79
11th Grade	6	1.63
12th Grade	2	0.54
Total	**369**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
3. Age		
13 or younger	3	0.77
14	54	13.88
15	122	31.36
16	97	24.94
17	83	21.34
18	29	7.46
19+	1	0.26
Total	**389**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
4. Gender		
Female	179	47.35
Male	199	52.65
Total	**378**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
5a. Hours spent in a typical week: Doing written homework		
0	10	2.56
1	102	26.15
2-5	162	41.54
6-10	83	21.28
10+	33	8.46
Total	**390**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
5b. Hours spent in a typical week: Reading and studying for class		
0	31	7.97
1	151	38.82
2-5	156	40.10
6-10	42	10.80
10+	9	2.31
Total	**389**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
5c. Hours spent in a typical week: Reading for yourself (books, magazines, newspapers, online articles, etc)		
0	50	12.79
1	151	38.62
2-5	129	32.99
6-10	36	9.21
10+	25	6.39
Total	**391**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
5d. Hours spent in a typical week: Participating in school-sponsored activities (clubs, athletics, student government, etc.)		
0	62	16.06
1	71	18.39
2-5	116	30.05
6-10	64	16.58
10+	73	18.91
Total	**386**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5e. Hours spent in a typical week: Practicing a sport and/or musical instrument and/or rehearsing for a performance		
0	71	18.35
1	35	9.04
2-5	106	27.39
6-10	77	19.90
10+	98	25.32
Total	**387**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5f. Hours spent in a typical week: Working for pay		
0	201	52.21
1	45	11.69
2-5	60	15.58
6-10	42	10.91
10+	37	9.61
Total	**385**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5g. Hours spent in a typical week: Doing volunteer work		
0	179	46.37
1	122	31.61
2-5	70	18.13
6-10	7	1.81
10+	8	2.07
Total	**386**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5h. Hours spent in a typical week: Exercising		
0	26	6.75
1	68	17.66
2-5	148	38.44
6-10	89	23.12
10+	54	14.03
Total	**385**	**100.00**

[redacted]

HSSSE 2007 Frequencies

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5i. Hours spent in a typical week: Watching television, playing video games		
0	14	3.62
1	70	18.09
2-5	177	45.74
6-10	68	17.57
10+	58	14.99
Total	**387**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5j. Hours spent in a typical week: 'Surfing' or chatting online		
0	33	8.53
1	66	17.05
2-5	121	31.27
6-10	98	25.32
10+	69	17.83
Total	**387**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5k. Hours spent in a typical week: Talking on the phone (including cell phones)		
0	23	6.01
1	140	36.55
2-5	123	32.11
6-10	57	14.88
10+	40	10.44
Total	**383**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5l. Hours spent in a typical week: Hanging out/socializing with friends outside of school		
0	5	1.28
1	23	5.88
2-5	110	28.13
6-10	120	30.69
10+	133	34.02
Total	**391**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5a. How important: Doing written homework?		
Not at all	18	4.68
A little	40	10.39
Somewhat important	159	41.30
Very important	138	35.84
Top priority	30	7.79
Total	385	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5b. How important: Reading and studying for class?		
Not at all	23	6.01
A little	73	19.06
Somewhat important	137	35.77
Very important	121	31.59
Top priority	29	7.57
Total	383	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5c. How important: Reading for yourself (books, magazines, newspapers, online articles, etc)?		
Not at all	45	11.84
A little	114	30.00
Somewhat important	128	33.68
Very important	78	20.53
Top priority	15	3.95
Total	380	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5d. How important: Participating in school-sponsored activities (clubs, athletics, student government, etc)?		
Not at all	41	10.73
A little	77	20.16
Somewhat important	109	28.53
Very important	116	30.37
Top priority	39	10.21
Total	382	100.00

[redacted]

HSSSE 2007 Frequencies

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5e. How important: Practicing a sport and/or musical instrument and/or rehearsing for a performance?		
Not at all	52	13.68
A little	43	11.32
Somewhat important	95	25.00
Very important	122	32.11
Top priority	68	17.89
Total	**380**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5f. How important: Working for pay?		
Not at all	98	26.06
A little	66	17.55
Somewhat important	86	22.87
Very important	99	26.33
Top priority	27	7.18
Total	**376**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5g. How important: Doing volunteer work?		
Not at all	96	25.67
A little	121	32.35
Somewhat important	89	23.80
Very important	58	15.51
Top priority	10	2.67
Total	**374**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5h. How important: Exercising?		
Not at all	19	5.04
A little	52	13.79
Somewhat important	115	30.50
Very important	150	39.79
Top priority	41	10.88
Total	**377**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5l. How important: Watching television, playing video games?		
Not at all	63	16.62
A little	151	39.84
Somewhat important	106	27.97
Very important	42	11.08
Top priority	17	4.49
Total	379	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5j. How important: 'Surfing' or chatting online?		
Not at all	69	18.25
A little	113	29.89
Somewhat important	122	32.28
Very important	57	15.08
Top priority	17	4.50
Total	378	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5k. How important: Talking on the phone (including cell phones)?		
Not at all	77	20.48
A little	115	30.59
Somewhat important	113	30.05
Very important	51	13.56
Top priority	20	5.32
Total	376	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
5l. How important: Hanging out/socializing with friends outside of school?		
Not at all	4	1.05
A little	24	6.28
Somewhat important	100	26.18
Very important	178	46.60
Top priority	76	19.90
Total	382	100.00

[redacted]

HSSSE 2007 Frequencies

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6a. Overall, I feel good about being in this school		
Strongly disagree	28	7.16
Disagree	63	16.11
Agree	238	60.87
Strongly agree	62	15.86
Total	**391**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6b. I care about this school		
Strongly disagree	38	9.79
Disagree	115	29.64
Agree	209	53.87
Strongly agree	26	6.70
Total	**388**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6c. I feel safe in this school		
Strongly disagree	14	3.60
Disagree	28	7.20
Agree	266	68.38
Strongly agree	81	20.82
Total	**389**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6d. I am treated fairly in this school		
Strongly disagree	26	6.70
Disagree	71	18.30
Agree	231	59.54
Strongly agree	60	15.46
Total	**388**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6e. I have a voice in classroom and/or school decisions		
Strongly disagree	31	7.97
Disagree	89	22.88
Agree	232	59.64
Strongly agree	37	9.51
Total	**389**	**100.00**

[redacted]

HSSSE 2007 Frequencies

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6f. My opinions are respected in this school		
Strongly disagree	31	7.97
Disagree	120	30.85
Agree	211	54.24
Strongly agree	27	6.94
Total	**389**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6g. There is at least one adult in this school who cares about me		
Strongly disagree	14	3.61
Disagree	28	7.22
Agree	227	58.51
Strongly agree	119	30.67
Total	**388**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6h. There is at least one adult in this school who knows me well		
Strongly disagree	21	5.38
Disagree	51	13.08
Agree	191	48.97
Strongly agree	127	32.56
Total	**390**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6i I feel supported by the following people at this school: i. teachers		
Strongly disagree	18	4.84
Disagree	30	8.06
Agree	268	72.04
Strongly agree	56	15.05
Total	**372**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6i. I feel supported by the following people at this school: ii. administrators (principal, assistant/vice principal, dean)		
Strongly disagree	44	11.40
Disagree	110	28.50
Agree	200	51.81
Strongly agree	32	8.29
Total	**386**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6i. I feel supported by the following people at this school: iii. counselors		
Strongly disagree	24	6.17
Disagree	67	17.22
Agree	241	61.95
Strongly agree	57	14.65
Total	389	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6i. I feel supported by the following people at this school: iv. other adults (secretaries, custodians, etc)		
Strongly disagree	35	9.11
Disagree	109	28.39
Agree	200	52.08
Strongly agree	40	10.42
Total	384	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6l. I feel supported by the following people at this school: v. other students		
Strongly disagree	17	4.42
Disagree	52	13.51
Agree	235	61.04
Strongly agree	81	21.04
Total	385	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6j. Adults in this school want me to succeed		
Strongly disagree	10	2.59
Disagree	25	6.48
Agree	262	67.88
Strongly agree	89	23.06
Total	386	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6k. Teachers try to engage me in classroom discussions		
Strongly disagree	17	4.45
Disagree	75	19.63
Agree	239	62.57
Strongly agree	51	13.35
Total	382	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6l. I am challenged academically by my class work		
Strongly disagree	21	5.48
Disagree	67	17.49
Agree	246	64.23
Strongly agree	49	12.79
Total	**383**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6m. I have opportunities to be creative in classroom assignments and projects		
Strongly disagree	21	5.44
Disagree	80	20.73
Agree	238	61.66
Strongly agree	47	12.18
Total	**386**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6n. I can be who I am at this school		
Strongly disagree	23	5.97
Disagree	78	20.26
Agree	224	58.18
Strongly agree	60	15.58
Total	**385**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6o. This school makes me feel confident about who I am		
Strongly disagree	37	9.59
Disagree	115	29.79
Agree	204	52.85
Strongly agree	30	7.77
Total	**386**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6p. I am an important part of my high school community		
Strongly disagree	40	10.34
Disagree	159	41.09
Agree	155	40.05
Strongly agree	33	8.53
Total	**387**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6q. This school's rules are fair		
Strongly disagree	95	24.87
Disagree	152	39.79
Agree	120	31.41
Strongly agree	15	3.93
Total	382	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6r. This school's rules are applied and enforced consistently		
Strongly disagree	48	12.53
Disagree	83	21.67
Agree	206	53.79
Strongly agree	46	12.01
Total	383	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6s. If I could choose a high school right now, I would choose to go to this same school again		
Strongly disagree	82	21.47
Disagree	116	30.37
Agree	146	38.22
Strongly agree	38	9.95
Total	382	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
6t. I am engaged in school		
Strongly disagree	39	10.08
Disagree	77	19.90
Agree	226	58.40
Strongly agree	45	11.63
Total	387	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7a. How often have you: Eaten breakfast in the morning?		
Never	25	6.46
Rarely	81	20.93
Sometimes	89	23.00
Often	192	49.61
Total	387	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7b. How often have you: Asked or answered questions in class?		
Never	10	2.58
Rarely	26	6.72
Sometimes	137	35.40
Often	214	55.30
Total	**387**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7c. How often have you: Talked to a teacher about your class work?		
Never	14	3.61
Rarely	75	19.33
Sometimes	166	42.78
Often	133	34.28
Total	**388**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7d. How often have you: Made a class presentation?		
Never	21	5.41
Rarely	124	31.96
Sometimes	189	48.71
Often	54	13.92
Total	**388**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7e. How often have you: Prepared a draft of a paper or assignment before turning it in?		
Never	73	18.96
Rarely	127	32.99
Sometimes	118	30.65
Often	67	17.40
Total	**385**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7f. How often have you: Written a paper of fewer than five pages?		
Never	10	2.57
Rarely	34	8.74
Sometimes	108	27.76
Often	237	60.93
Total	**389**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7g. How often have you: Written a paper of more than five pages?		
Never	84	21.99
Rarely	128	33.51
Sometimes	123	32.20
Often	47	12.30
Total	**382**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7h. How often have you: Received helpful feedback from teachers on assignments or other class work?		
Never	24	6.22
Rarely	68	17.62
Sometimes	194	50.26
Often	100	25.91
Total	**386**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7i. How often have you: Attended class with all assignments completed?		
Never	9	2.34
Rarely	46	11.95
Sometimes	124	32.21
Often	206	53.51
Total	**385**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7j. How often have you: Attended class with no assignments completed?		
Never	126	33.07
Rarely	138	36.22
Sometimes	87	22.83
Often	30	7.87
Total	**381**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7k. How often have you: Worked on a paper or project that required you to do research outside of assigned texts?		
Never	23	6.02
Rarely	75	19.63
Sometimes	195	51.05
Often	89	23.30
Total	**382**	**100.00**

[redacted]

HSSSE 2007 Frequencies

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7l. How often have you: Worked on a paper or project that required you to interact with people outside of school (for interviews, observations, etc)?		
Never	135	35.53
Rarely	141	37.11
Sometimes	84	22.11
Often	20	5.26
Total	380	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7m. How often have you: Worked with other students on projects/assignments during or outside of class?		
Never	29	7.65
Rarely	103	27.18
Sometimes	184	48.55
Often	63	16.62
Total	379	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7n. How often have you: Discussed questions in class that have no clear answers?		
Never	21	5.54
Rarely	101	26.65
Sometimes	172	45.38
Often	85	22.43
Total	379	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7o. How often have you: Taken a test in class with multiple-choice questions created by your teacher?		
Never	7	1.87
Rarely	25	6.67
Sometimes	107	28.53
Often	236	62.93
Total	375	100.00

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
7p. How often have you: Taken a test in class with essays or show-your-work problems created by your teacher?		
Never	9	2.42
Rarely	44	11.83
Sometimes	112	30.11
Often	207	55.65
Total	**372**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
7q. How often have you: Connected ideas or concepts from one class (or subject area) to another in doing assignments or participating in class discussions?		
Never	20	5.26
Rarely	122	32.11
Sometimes	184	48.42
Often	54	14.21
Total	**380**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
7r. How often have you: Discussed grades with teachers?		
Never	27	7.14
Rarely	75	19.84
Sometimes	180	47.62
Often	96	25.40
Total	**378**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
7s. How often have you: Discussed ideas from readings or classes with teachers outside of class?		
Never	85	22.49
Rarely	148	39.15
Sometimes	109	28.84
Often	36	9.52
Total	**378**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7t. How often have you: Discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (friends, family members, coworkers, etc)?		
Never	50	13.23
Rarely	107	28.31
Sometimes	150	39.68
Often	71	18.78
Total	378	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7u. How often have you: Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student of a race or ethnicity different from your own?		
Never	18	4.74
Rarely	63	16.58
Sometimes	163	42.89
Often	136	35.79
Total	380	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7v. How often have you: Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student who differs from you in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, income background, or personal values?		
Never	21	5.50
Rarely	47	12.30
Sometimes	160	41.88
Often	154	40.31
Total	382	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7w. How often have you: Talked to an adult in the school about career goals?		
Never	30	7.92
Rarely	83	21.90
Sometimes	181	47.76
Often	85	22.43
Total	379	100.00

[redacted]

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	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7x. How often have you: Talked to an adult in the school about how to apply for college?		
Never	77	20.16
Rarely	100	26.18
Sometimes	137	35.86
Often	68	17.80
Total	**382**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7y. How often have you: Been picked on or been bullied by another student?		
Never	166	43.68
Rarely	122	32.11
Sometimes	65	17.11
Often	27	7.11
Total	**380**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
7z. How often have you: Picked on or bullied another student?		
Never	190	49.87
Rarely	127	33.33
Sometimes	47	12.34
Often	17	4.46
Total	**381**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8a. I place a high value on learning		
Strongly disagree	14	3.69
Disagree	38	10.03
Agree	209	55.15
Strongly agree	118	31.13
Total	**379**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8b. I have the skills and ability to complete my work		
Strongly disagree	8	2.13
Disagree	14	3.73
Agree	204	54.40
Strongly agree	149	39.73
Total	**375**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8c. I put forth a great deal of effort when doing my school work		
Strongly disagree	23	6.08
Disagree	103	27.25
Agree	191	50.53
Strongly agree	61	16.14
Total	**378**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8d. I am motivated to work by a desire to learn		
Strongly disagree	32	8.44
Disagree	116	30.61
Agree	175	46.17
Strongly agree	56	14.78
Total	**379**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8e. I am motivated to work by a desire to get good grades		
Strongly disagree	16	4.23
Disagree	50	13.23
Agree	199	52.65
Strongly agree	113	29.89
Total	**378**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8f. I am motivated to work by teachers who encourage me		
Strongly disagree	30	7.98
Disagree	120	31.91
Agree	183	48.67
Strongly agree	43	11.44
Total	**376**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8g. I am motivated to work by a desire to succeed in the world outside of school		
Strongly disagree	20	5.32
Disagree	40	10.64
Agree	181	48.14
Strongly agree	135	35.90
Total	**376**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8h. I take pride in the quality of my school work		
Strongly disagree	17	4.50
Disagree	90	23.81
Agree	204	53.97
Strongly agree	67	17.72
Total	**378**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8i. I have worked harder than I expected to in school		
Strongly disagree	36	9.57
Disagree	156	41.49
Agree	148	39.36
Strongly agree	36	9.57
Total	**376**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8j. I like discussions in which there are no clear answers		
Strongly disagree	32	8.58
Disagree	116	31.10
Agree	160	42.90
Strongly agree	65	17.43
Total	**373**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8k. I enjoy the opportunity to be creative in school		
Strongly disagree	21	5.57
Disagree	53	14.06
Agree	208	55.17
Strongly agree	95	25.20
Total	**377**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8l. I enjoy working on tasks that require a lot of thinking and mental effort		
Strongly disagree	34	9.07
Disagree	128	34.13
Agree	161	42.93
Strongly agree	52	13.87
Total	**375**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8m. My school work makes me curious to learn other things		
Strongly disagree	31	8.31
Disagree	117	31.37
Agree	189	50.67
Strongly agree	36	9.65
Total	373	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8n. In general, I am excited about my classes		
Strongly disagree	56	14.85
Disagree	184	48.81
Agree	120	31.83
Strongly agree	17	4.51
Total	377	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8o. I value the rewards (grades, awards, etc) that I get at school for my work		
Strongly disagree	20	5.36
Disagree	77	20.64
Agree	205	54.96
Strongly agree	71	19.03
Total	373	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8p. I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school		
Strongly disagree	43	11.41
Disagree	89	23.61
Agree	189	50.13
Strongly agree	56	14.85
Total	377	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8q. I feel good about who I am as a student		
Strongly disagree	19	5.09
Disagree	76	20.38
Agree	209	56.03
Strongly agree	69	18.50
Total	373	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
8r. I feel good about who I am as a person		
Strongly disagree	11	3.00
Disagree	27	7.36
Agree	195	53.13
Strongly agree	134	36.51
Total	367	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
9. About how many of your teachers want you to do the best work you can do?		
None	8	2.12
1 or 2	39	10.32
Some	86	22.75
Most	122	32.28
All	123	32.54
Total	378	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
10. About how many of your teachers believe you can do excellent work?		
None	7	1.86
1 or 2	43	11.41
Some	80	21.22
Most	132	35.01
All	115	30.50
Total	377	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
11. About how many of your classes challenge you academically?		
None	19	5.05
1 or 2	82	21.81
Some	112	29.79
Most	123	32.71
All	40	10.64
Total	376	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
12. About how many of your classes DO NOT require you to work hard?		
None	69	18.55
1 or 2	151	40.59
Some	101	27.15
Most	40	10.75
All	11	2.96
Total	372	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
13. In about how many classes do you give your maximum effort?		
None	46	12.17
1 or 2	68	17.99
Some	106	28.04
Most	118	31.22
All	40	10.58
Total	378	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
14. In about how many classes do you put in very little effort		
None	84	22.34
1 or 2	155	41.22
Some	67	17.82
Most	42	11.17
All	28	7.45
Total	376	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
15a. My school emphasizes: Memorizing facts and figures in work for classes		
Not at all	28	7.51
A little	86	23.06
Some	150	40.21
Very much	109	29.22
Total	373	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
15b. My school emphasizes: Understanding information and ideas in work for classes		
Not at all	15	4.05
A little	69	18.65
Some	158	42.70
Very much	128	34.59
Total	**370**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
15c. My school emphasizes: Analyzing ideas in depth in work for classes		
Not at all	25	6.74
A little	83	22.37
Some	174	46.90
Very much	89	23.99
Total	**371**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
15d. My school emphasizes: Spending a lot of time studying and doing school work		
Not at all	23	6.25
A little	55	14.95
Some	147	39.95
Very much	143	38.86
Total	**368**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
15e. My school emphasizes: Spending a lot of time preparing for state and district standardized tests		
Not at all	18	4.89
A little	66	17.93
Some	129	35.05
Very much	155	42.12
Total	**368**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
15f. My school emphasizes: Participating in school events and activities (athletics, plays, etc)		
Not at all	20	5.38
A little	79	21.24
Some	150	40.32
Very much	123	33.06
Total	**372**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
15g. My school emphasizes: Using computers for class work		
Not at all	33	8.94
A little	92	24.93
Some	144	39.02
Very much	100	27.10
Total	**369**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
15h. My school emphasizes: Exploring new ideas		
Not at all	34	9.21
A little	101	27.37
Some	165	44.72
Very much	69	18.70
Total	**369**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
15i. My school emphasizes: Continuing schooling beyond high school (college, career training, etc)		
Not at all	17	4.59
A little	44	11.89
Some	92	24.86
Very much	217	58.65
Total	**370**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
16a. School contributed to growth: Acquiring skills related to work after high school		
Not at all	47	12.91
A little	98	26.92
Some	157	43.13
Very much	62	17.03
Total	**364**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
16b. School contributed to growth: Writing effectively		
Not at all	32	8.77
A little	72	19.73
Some	163	44.66
Very much	98	26.85
Total	**365**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16c. School contributed to growth: Speaking effectively		
Not at all	36	9.84
A little	85	23.22
Some	148	40.44
Very much	97	26.50
Total	366	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16d. School contributed to growth: Thinking critically		
Not at all	29	7.90
A little	54	14.71
Some	182	49.59
Very much	102	27.79
Total	367	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16e. School contributed to growth: Reading and understanding challenging materials		
Not at all	27	7.46
A little	68	18.78
Some	179	49.45
Very much	88	24.31
Total	362	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16f. School contributed to growth: Using computers and the Internet		
Not at all	53	14.44
A little	76	20.71
Some	146	39.78
Very much	92	25.07
Total	367	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16g. School contributed to growth: Working well with others		
Not at all	36	9.86
A little	81	22.19
Some	169	46.30
Very much	79	21.64
Total	365	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16h. School contributed to growth: Learning independently		
Not at all	39	10.60
A little	91	24.73
Some	155	42.12
Very much	83	22.55
Total	**368**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16i. School contributed to growth: Solving real-world problems		
Not at all	82	22.22
A little	91	24.66
Some	147	39.84
Very much	49	13.28
Total	**369**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16j. School contributed to growth: Gaining awareness of conditions in the community outside of school		
Not at all	56	15.30
A little	123	33.61
Some	125	34.15
Very much	62	16.94
Total	**366**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16k. School contributed to growth: Developing clear career goals		
Not at all	57	15.53
A little	97	26.43
Some	146	39.78
Very much	67	18.26
Total	**367**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16l. School contributed to growth: Understanding the relevance of school work to life after high school		
Not at all	71	19.40
A little	76	20.77
Some	145	39.62
Very much	74	20.22
Total	**366**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16m. School contributed to growth: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds		
Not at all	82	22.47
A little	95	26.03
Some	113	30.96
Very much	75	20.55
Total	365	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16n. School contributed to growth: Understanding yourself		
Not at all	87	24.03
A little	81	22.38
Some	134	37.02
Very much	60	16.57
Total	362	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16o. School contributed to growth: Treating people with respect		
Not at all	41	11.29
A little	75	20.66
Some	151	41.60
Very much	96	26.45
Total	363	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
16p. School contributed to growth: Developing personal beliefs and values		
Not at all	67	18.36
A little	75	20.55
Some	144	39.45
Very much	79	21.64
Total	365	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
17a. Have done during high school: Participated in community service or volunteer work?		
No	64	17.07
Yes	311	82.93
Total	375	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
17b. Have done during high school: Participated in a work-study program?		
No	289	77.90
Yes	82	22.10
Total	**371**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
17c. Have done during high school: Taken one or more Advanced Placement (AP) courses, or courses at a college/university?		
No	220	59.30
Yes	151	40.70
Total	**371**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
17d. Have done during high school: Participated in an arts program or arts project in school?		
No	116	31.18
Yes	256	68.82
Total	**372**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
17e. Have done during high school: Participated in an arts program or arts project outside of school?		
No	228	60.96
Yes	146	39.04
Total	**374**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because I enjoy being in school		
No response	278	70.74
Yes	115	29.26
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because of what I learn in classes		
No response	251	63.87
Yes	142	36.13
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because of my teacher(s)		
No response	313	79.64
Yes	80	20.36
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because of my peers/friends		
No response	123	31.30
Yes	270	68.70
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because it's the law		
No response	146	37.15
Yes	247	62.85
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because I want to get a degree and go to college		
No response	82	20.87
Yes	311	79.13
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because I want to acquire skills for the workplace		
No response	234	59.54
Yes	159	40.46
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Because there's nothing else to do		
No response	304	77.35
Yes	89	22.65
Total	**393**	**100.00**

[redacted]

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	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: To stay out of trouble		
No response	314	79.90
Yes	79	20.10
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
18. Why do you go to school?: Other		
No response	330	83.97
Yes	63	16.03
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
19. Have you ever skipped school?		
Never	231	62.43
Once or twice	95	25.68
Many times	44	11.89
Total	**370**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
20. Have you ever considered dropping out of high school?		
Never	318	86.65
Once or twice	35	9.54
Many times	14	3.81
Total	**367**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: The work was too hard		
No response	360	91.60
Yes	33	8.40
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: The work was too easy		
No response	383	97.46
Yes	10	2.54
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I didn't like the school		
No response	346	88.04
Yes	47	11.96
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I didn't like the teachers		
No response	366	93.13
Yes	27	6.87
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I didn't see the value in the work I was being asked to do		
No response	363	92.37
Yes	30	7.63
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I was picked on or bullied		
No response	377	95.93
Yes	16	4.07
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I needed to work for money		
No response	375	95.42
Yes	18	4.58
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: No adults in the school cared about me		
No response	381	96.95
Yes	12	3.05
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: Family issues		
No response	366	93.13
Yes	27	6.87
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I felt I was too far behind in credits to graduate		
No response	371	94.40
Yes	22	5.60
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: I failed required standardized tests for graduation		
No response	385	97.96
Yes	8	2.04
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: Adults in school encouraged me to drop out		
No response	383	97.46
Yes	10	2.54
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
21. Why drop out?: Other		
No response	373	94.91
Yes	20	5.09
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
22. Have you ever been held back a grade level in school?		
No	336	90.81
Yes	34	9.19
Total	**370**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
23. Do you believe you are in danger of being held back a grade level this year?		
No	320	87.43
Yes	46	12.57
Total	**366**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
24. Have you ever been bored in class in high school?		
Never	5	1.34
Once or twice	16	4.29
Once in a while	105	28.15
Every day	197	52.82
Every class	50	13.40
Total	**373**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
25. Why bored?: Work wasn't challenging enough		
No response	278	70.74
Yes	115	29.26
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
25. Why bored?: Work was too difficult		
No response	282	71.76
Yes	111	28.24
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
25. Why bored?: Material wasn't interesting		
No response	82	20.87
Yes	311	79.13
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
25. Why bored?: Material wasn't relevant to me		
No response	245	62.34
Yes	148	37.66
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
25. Why bored?: No interaction with teacher		
No response	275	69.97
Yes	118	30.03
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
25. Why bored?: Other		
No response	343	87.28
Yes	50	12.72
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26a. What excites/engages you?: Teacher lecture		
Not at all	162	44.51
A little	117	32.14
Some	71	19.51
Very much	14	3.85
Total	**364**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26b. What excites/engages you?: Discussion and debate		
Not at all	47	13.02
A little	72	19.94
Some	142	39.34
Very much	100	27.70
Total	**361**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26c. What excites/engages you?: Individual reading		
Not at all	145	40.17
A little	123	34.07
Some	61	16.90
Very much	32	8.86
Total	**361**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26d. What excites/engages you?: Writing projects		
Not at all	156	43.33
A little	112	31.11
Some	72	20.00
Very much	20	5.56
Total	360	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26e. What excites/engages you?: Research projects		
Not at all	119	32.87
A little	121	33.43
Some	99	27.35
Very much	23	6.35
Total	362	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26f. What excites/engages you?: Group projects		
Not at all	60	16.76
A little	89	24.86
Some	150	41.90
Very much	59	16.48
Total	358	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26g. What excites/engages you?: Presentations		
Not at all	109	30.53
A little	99	27.73
Some	120	33.61
Very much	29	8.12
Total	357	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26h. What excites/engages you?: Role plays		
Not at all	108	30.51
A little	104	29.38
Some	96	27.12
Very much	46	12.99
Total	354	100.00

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
26l. What excites/engages you?: Art and drama activities		
Not at all	87	24.44
A little	85	23.88
Some	87	24.44
Very much	97	27.25
Total	**356**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
27. What language is primarily spoken in your home?: English		
No response	94	23.92
Yes	299	76.08
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
27. What language is primarily spoken in your home?: Other language(s)		
No response	294	74.81
Yes	99	25.19
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
28. Were you born in the United States?		
No	48	13.45
Yes	309	86.55
Total	**357**	**100.00**

	[redacted]	
	Frequency	Column%
29. How do you identify yourself by race and/or ethnicity?		
Native American	3	0.76
Asian	17	4.33
Black	11	2.80
Latino	56	14.25
Middle Eastern	4	1.02
White	228	58.02
No Response	44	11.20
Multiracial	30	7.63
Total	**393**	**100.00**

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
30. Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch?		
No	272	74.93
Yes	28	7.71
Do not know/Prefer not to answer	63	17.36
Total	363	100.00

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
31. How far do you want to go in your schooling?		
Do not know/Not applicable	26	7.93
Did not finish high school	9	2.74
High school diploma or GED	10	3.05
Two-year college degree	11	3.35
Four-year college degree	120	36.59
Masters degree	84	25.61
Doctorate or other advanced professional degree	68	20.73
Total	328	100.00

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
32. What is the highest level of schooling that your parents or guardians completed?		
Do not know/Not applicable	47	13.51
Did not finish high school	8	2.30
High school diploma or GED	44	12.64
Two-year college degree	26	7.47
Four-year college degree	92	26.44
Masters degree	89	25.57
Doctorate or other advanced professional degree	42	12.07
Total	348	100.00

	[redacted] Frequency	Column%
33. Grades		
Grades not used/Do not know	2	0.56
Mostly Ds and below	4	1.12
Mostly Cs and Ds	34	9.52
Mostly Bs and Cs	130	36.41
Mostly As and Bs	117	32.77
Mostly As	70	19.61
Total	357	100.00

APPENDIX E

Transcripts of the Focus Group Discussions

Transcript of Focus Group Meeting One

Conducted on: 08/21/07

Administrative Numerical Assignment and Role:

Member #1: Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and High School Principal

Member #2: Elementary Principal, Grades 2-4

Member #3: Director of Special Services

Member #4: Elementary Principal, Grades K-1

Member #5: Director of Guidance Services

Member #6: Superintendent, NOT PRESENT

Member #7: Director of Athletics, NOT PRESENT

Member #8: Principal, Middle School

Member #9: Assistant Superintendent for Finance

Researcher: Valerie Feit

Researcher: We are going to look at page 13 and just taking a moment we are going to look at pages 13, 14, 15 and the top of 16.

Member 2: Oh, the print is small. I don't have my glasses.

Member 5: Are we discussing these questions? Excuse me, number two; I was speaking to the group leader. Are we discussing these questions (holds up the interview guide)?

Researcher: We are discussing your perceptions of the data and what you are getting from it.

Member 2: You want us to look at all of these pages?

Researcher: Just 13, 14 and 15; to just review those pages.

(Pause for focus group participants to read text)

Researcher: Does anyone have anything they would like to comment

on?

Member 3: I looked at 7a how often prepared a draft of a paper before turning it in. Prepared a draft, you would assume that, you know, we are constantly on the kids to do this. The percentage that do, 32 or 33%. I was just…that was interesting. Then, a couple of other things, working with other kids, on page 15, working with other students on project assignments outside of class, I expected it would be higher. We put a premium on kids working together in groups and that somewhat surprised me. And, interacting with people outside of school, for interviews, observations, things like that, would make it much more reality-based and practical and so forth. I was just surprised by the high percentages of those types of responses to things that we stand for in terms of our emphasis and our values. Those somewhat surprised me and

kids not acting, discussing with teachers, discussing their grades with teachers; there are some high percentages there.

Member 1: I agree. I reacted to the same things on page 15. The questions to the students are very interesting. What we are looking at now through the 21stcentury skills it is certainly obvious that those things are needed and that we are promoting that and that when you see it from the kids' perspectives we are not doing as good a job as we need to. I was disappointed at 7o, which indicates the high percentage of multiple choice questions on a test because we are trying to move away from that. You know, it is the easier way for many teachers. And, you know they are still using a quicker and easier way, and they are still doing that. I would like to see more of 7m, with more of the problem solving and creativity. I think that I see…my issue is that I find parents don't like that kind of instruction. We are meeting with a parent on Thursday who is a really linear thinker and wants everything very concrete and if there is no answer, and you give a "well it depends" kind of question the parents are crazed. So, some of it's that we have a lot of re-education to do as we deal with our strategic plan. Obviously, there are needs.

Member 3: Where do these questions come from?

Researcher: These questions come from the High School Survey of Student Engagement.

Member 3: Is it national?

Researcher: It is available nationally. Any school district that wants to participate can contact the University of Indiana and do so.

Member 2: Two that jumped out at me are 7c and 7h, where they talked about talking to a teacher about class work and getting feedback from the teacher. I was surprised that you are looking at almost 25% where the kids are saying they have never or rarely had feedback. I think that again is something that, because our class sizes are rather small and our school population is small, that that is taking place on a regular basis. But, apparently from the perception the children…I am wondering are these the children who are struggling and they are falling through the cracks, or is the other way around? The other end of the spectrum, the really bright kids who don't feel the need to have a discussion with their teacher about class work or grades.

Member 1: I have another question as you pose it…are the teachers inviting that kind of dialogue?

Member 5: I think also the question is how accurate this is. I look at the numbers for us, because we are a small school, we know our kids individually so when I see 10% here and 14% there, I can almost figure out which kids are saying; "I am just going to answer this way." You always get kids who are going to answer a survey this way and other questions that are brought into account so that you can factor that in when you are doing your research. But, there is nobody that I can think of in the high school who hasn't had a conversation with his or her teacher about what happens in the classroom.

Member 1: I think that there are some teachers who don't invite it. I think there are kids who want it…

Member 5: It doesn't say "all your teachers" so I can't think of an invite from A to Z that hasn't had a conversation…if they (students) are just given this (survey) and there is no instruction, there is nobody asking what do you really mean by "talking to a teacher" and all those kinds of things, and they interpret it however they interpret it then they answer it that way.

Member 4: Then my question is was the student allowed clarification of any of these questions while they were being given the survey?

Researcher: We are looking at a snapshot. If you go through the entire survey, you will see that these questions are re-approached in different ways. So we are looking at, you know, just a small piece of the survey right now. So, yes, I think that they were given an opportunity to ask for clarification. As the survey evolves the clarification is built in…some of it is built in.

Member 8: What time of the year was this given?

Researcher: This was given in April.

Member 8: Certainly, for the high school, I think, that for "working outside of school on projects and presentations" the senior internship program, which is a very big part of senior year, could have an impact on the numbers. If it had been given at the end of June that might be significant. Another thing is, I would be very…and I don't know if you could break any of these questions down more specifically, but looking at 7b, "How often have you asked or answered question in class?" Those are two dramatically different things, or can be for some kids. I would be very interested in separating those two into how much of each because we look at class participation and count that as class participation. But, you probably have your frequently called on kids, who are frequent hand-raisers that are

called on simply because they are (participant demonstrates with a wave of their hand)…and a lot of different stratifications of those. So, I would be very interested in seeing those…in terms of class participation and engagement.

Member 2: Were they (the students) asked to reflect on specifically their high school years? Or, were they asked to reflect on their (name of school district) education? Because as I look at 71, the project that requires you to interact with people outside of school, what jumped out at me was, gee if they are looking at…their (name of school district) education…I mean, every single second grader goes out into the community and interviews someone for a community project. Were they asked to focus on their high school years or were they focusing on their total education? That jumped right out at me.

Member 5: The same thing with the internship and every ninth grader has to give a speech in their class. You wonder what they are thinking.

Member 1: I don't think they were given that kind of direction. But, knowing what we go through on senior exit interviews, which is just kind of a verbal statement of this (gestures with hand to indicate HSSSE data) I think

the kids intend to remember what's they last thing they did. I don't think they are reflecting back to kindergarten.

Member 2: But, that is important. What are you reflecting on?

Member 3: I would approach this totally differently, and that is obviously the way I do things. I am looking at what is the bottom line in terms of the data. I think that the percentages, the total percentages, school climate and relationships, those are really really strong. How I would look at it… is that school engagement and classroom engagement…what are the questions that pull from and result in these percentages to see…that yes, some do…and some overlap…and these are small questions…and for school engagement…there are probably, what…how many questions.

Member 2: Well, what is school engagement?

Member 3: There could be a lot of different things here that talk about what specifically what pulled that number down.

Researcher: Let's look forward and look at some of the other data.

It will help to round this conversation out. Look at page 17 and then page 19.

Member 2: Why are we skipping 18?

Researcher: We are taking a quick overlook today. If you feel like moving on, pages 21 and 22 follow. We are focusing on 17, 19, 21 and 22. If anyone wants to look at 20…you do not have to look at only these specific pages. (Participants pause to read the data)

Researcher: I just want to remind everyone of the interview guide questions, they may help to give a framework to what you are seeing. How we might utilize the data to individualize opportunities, or how students are learning inside and outside of school, what might be an effective way to share this with the teachers, what are your perceptions?

Member 8: Looking at page 17, at 7u and 7v, students are having conversations with other races, ethnicities or religious backgrounds; I wonder how hard the kids had to think about who they work with to answer these questions. Because, on a positive note, I think a lot of times, at this point in our classrooms, they don't really think about that anymore. I would guess they had to think about that. That they look around and think about some of their friends and think, hmmm, are they…what ethnic background, what religious background they are. So, looking at those

numbers, I think they thought about that quite a bit. The other comment I had was, 8i on page 20, "I worked harder than I expected in school" and 11 on page 22, about how many classes challenge you academically. In terms of the interview guide questions about their perceptions versus our perceptions, it seems to me frequently we get into conversations with more so parents than students, but they think they are not being challenged and we think they are. We say, well if you say you are not being challenged, how come you are only getting an 87? How come you are not doing better? So, it turns into motivation. We need to look at the issue of challenge from different perspectives.

Member 3: I was struck by, on page 21, kids 8n and 8m, the schoolwork not making them curious to learn other things and excitement about their classes. Those are very depressing. It shows, in certain ways, which is interesting…I see they feel connected to the teachers, by their responses. But, (names the high school principal) had mentioned something about all the 21stcentury skills, something we are going to be addressing, which is great, looking at the students' perceptions because they are surely not seeing that connection, a lot of them, between high school and what comes after. It is just not there. It

is not there on a number of these questions. It seems pretty consistent so far in terms of the kids' perceptions of it.

Member 2: If you look at 8p, "I see how the work I am doing now will help me after high school" …64% agree or strongly agree, so they must be seeing some connection. But, I am wondering if 8n, is tied into 11, in that if they don't feel . . . if their perception is that they are not being academically challenged, is that why they are not excited about their classes?

Member 5: What if you asked an adult if they are excited about going to work, which is what school is for kids.

Member 2: If you ask the superintendent, he would say he is.

Member 5: Of course, we are thrilled and excited every day. But, if you ask the general public . . .

Member 3: But, are you curious to learn other things?

Member 5: I was impressed that 50% said they agree that they are excited to learn other things.

Member 3: But, there are 31% and 8% who are not, that is not great.

Member 5: For school?

Member 3: I am talking about curiosity. I am not talking about loving to get up in the morning to come to school.

Member 1: I think it's a little bit of a dilemma because we all know the research that says that curiosity disappears, as they get older and come into high school. And, we know that curiosity is an important skill for the future. If you are not curious, you won't ask questions. If you don't ask questions you are not going to solve problems and so forth, and it all fits into 21stcentury. I think it is typical for a portion of high school kids not to say that they are curious. I think our challenge is, 60% is good and it is more than half. The challenge is how we create an atmosphere where most teenagers are curious the way they are when they are five or six years old. That is the challenge we are facing because if they are not curious, then they are going to be happy with the status quo and they are going to be all the things we worry about with the future will come to fruition.

Member 4: Let's go to 15a, on page 23, I jumped ahead. Almost 70% of them see school as memorizing facts and figures. I was nervous about that.

Member 1: That is very scary.

Member 4: And, then number 13, the question was, "in how many classes do you give your maximum effort?" It is about 41% and if you add "some", it is up to about 70%.

Member 1: You are right, (names elementary school principal), I think…and, I am disappointed to think they think of school as memorizing and then I think of some of the staff and how they work with the kids. And, so much of what they are asking them to do is remember and give back facts with multiple-choice questions, which are the biggest kind of tests we give. That is what we ask for, so I think this is good because it is just another element (hand indicates HSSSE data printout) in our whole strategic plan. We are thinking about changing the way we think about teaching and learning.

Member 5: If they are preparing for a Regent's exam, how much of the classroom exam is being spent doing those sorts of things.

Member 2: If you look at 15e that answers your question. They say that 77% say they spend a lot of time preparing for state and district standardized tests.

Member 4:I don't think that they (students) look at some of the questions on the standardized tests as critical thinking questions. When they have to take the facts that

they know they have to memorize and concepts and extrapolate out to find answers to critical thinking questions. That is a higher-level process itself.

Member 1: When the teachers do that, the kids have this discomfort. We see it first in tenth grade with (names teacher) AP Euro. It drives the parents over the edge and the kids over the edge because you don't have those answers. The questions say, what did you learn, what do you think, and they are (hand gesture indicates confusion).

Member 4: It is this constant…

Member 1: It is that they can't get their "A" because they studied five hours. They can recite everything but they…

Member 4: They study, but they can't think for five hours.

Member 1: Well, they don't know how to take what they have and…

We are in the throes of change right now. I think we have to be able to support, as we are talking her right now, the teachers differently. The assessments have to look different.

Member 4: We have to ask different questions.

Member 1: Exactly.

Member 4: And, that is the key.

Member 1: Exactly. And, then it requires state education departments, the College Board and everybody else to assess these kids…to move away from the things we've seen.

Member 4: To be more open-ended.

Member 1: Yes.

Member 9: To change gears a little bit. I was looking at a couple of the questions on page 21 and 22. In particular, 8o, "I value the rewards that I get at school." And, 8q, "I feel good about who I am as a student and as a person." These are the self-esteem type questions. They are off the charts on the agree and strongly agree. It is very interesting. I think that even the students who might be going through it, marking down the "rarely, rarely"…these jumped out. We certainly have kids who are feeling good about themselves.

Member 4: You are right.

Member 9: This is consistent with some studies that I have seen on American students' self-perceptions.

Member 1: Yes, yes, exactly.

Member 8: High on self-esteem.

(All participants laugh)

Member 8: May I make one more comment.

Researcher: Yes, of course.

Member 8: I think 8p is such a fundamental question. 8p on page 21. Will this help me after high school? It is so dependent on their environment and family situation. I would be very interested in asking the same question in four years or 10 years, or 20 years. Was the stuff they learned in high school useful to them now? You are really asking them to project. This is the basic idea of education and very relevant to our 21stcentury view. I think that is an extremely significant question. Another one that I think we would get great value out of looking at deeper perceptions. I agree and strongly agree (this part of the conversation was based on how many students reported that they think that what they are learning now will be useful to them in the future), 64% . . . what specifically are they thinking about? What are they doing right now that will help them? I would be curious to see if that matches what we think is significant and what they are doing now.

Researcher: I am glad you went to that point…through page 24. I was going to suggest pages 24, 25, 26 and 27. And, then finally ending up with 34, 35 and 36. So, let's move forward into the 20's here.

(Participants take time to read these pages)

Member 1: We are dealing with an issue in the middle school right now with reading, writing and language skills. It is interesting to see that right now, we are roughly…75% of the kids feel good about what they are learning and acquiring, and 25%, who are not becoming proficient in those areas. I guess I would like to think about those kids. It is not a surprise for me to see the statistics because I do believe we have been wrestling with looking at high school data moving kids. There is always 25%, or you go between 20 and 25%, who you can't move into that 75% range academically. And, there are kids who are struggling. I am not sure, if we are addressing their needs or if we are getting them by. They are making it, but they are not, of if, they are getting all of the skills they need. Even if they are taking the state assessments, they are passing, but they are not where they need to be. That has been consistent for a long time. Typically, the kids who fall into there (meaning the 25%) are new to our district, middle and or high school. They haven't come through our district. They are kids who come from immigrant families so they are dealing with other language issues. Or, some are dealing with some other kinds of family situations. I am not surprised with the statistic of

kids who are not feeling that we are addressing their needs and I am not satisfied that we are addressing it. Even with 75% or 80% of our population (gestures toward the HSSSE report and indicates the number of students who report that the school is addressing their needs)…there is a bit of our population who are being left behind.

Member 3: When you mention, I guess, to me when I am looking at percentages, even in the 60's and 70's, you are leaving a whole bunch of kids out. It is interesting as you go into this, as you go further (gesture indicates the HSSSE report) which is probably where I would want to start. These are where I would want to start. These are the more interesting questions that are posed to the kids. Because these questions, these are the meat of it. This is where you are getting the information in terms of what we are doing well in and what we have to continue to work on. On page 27, you start with 16h, you start with 34% are saying the school is not contributing to our independent functioning, learning and solving real life problems. 46% are saying that you (the school) are not doing that. Awareness of conditions in the community, 48% are saying we haven't hit that. Developing clear career goals, that shocked me, 41%. The relevance to school work to life

after school, is 39th percentile. I mean, those are pretty interesting statistics.

Member 2: 16k, I am not so surprised about that. A lot of kids, when they leave high school, they really don't know what they want to do. And, it is not until they get into college…

Member 5: Or, after.

Member 2: Or, after that, they…Well, they get into college and start working through a program and they say, "Whoa, this isn't for me" and they switch. So, this doesn't surprise me as much.

Member 5: Some of the jobs these people will be doing aren't even invented yet.

Member 2: But, the one that does surprise me is a lot is 16i, that they don't feel that we have taught them how to solve real world problems. That is a high number.

Member 3: If you look at 16g, "working well with others" on page 26.

Member 4: 57% say they do.

Member 3: I don't think that is good.

Member 4: I am not saying that.

Member 1: It is because I did away with Junior/Senior Day. (The speaker refers to misconduct on the part of students

that resulted in the cancellation of this event.) They used to claim that that was a time for them all to work together. It brought them all together. They used to tell us that at senior exit interviews. That was great. They had to solve these problems together. (Laughter from group)

Member 2: When you compare some of these answers with some of the specific questions in here (gesture indicates the HSSSE report) the numbers don't match up.

Member 4: You have some contradictions here. If you look at 16d, 77% say the school has contributed to their growth in terms of thinking critically and yet, they say that teaching they are being asked to learn facts. So, that's…

Member 2: But, this is like all surveys. Although, what order were the questions asked? How many questions were there all together?

Researcher: I don't have the survey. It is over 108.

Member 2: Oh, forget it. Once they get to question #23, they are…

Member 5: (Laughs)

Researcher: I received feedback from students, after the survey was administered, to say that they enjoyed it. Clearly, it was long. They felt it was thorough.

Member 4: When was this being given?

Member 5: April.

Member 4: A class period?

Member 1: A class period.

Researcher: Social studies.

Member 2: But, you know what skews these numbers are the kids who really don't care.

Member 1: Or, the kids who don't like to read.

Member 2: The kids who don't care, or the kid who is disgruntled, or whatever. So, they disagree, disagree, disagree.

Member 8: This is not at all…

(The group speaks simultaneously for five seconds)

Member 5: We don't know what they think when they answer the survey.

Member 4: Or, they over analyze.

Member 5: Or, "I can't say never, so now I have to say sometimes or never." Usually…

Member 4: Or, especially a child who really struggled figuring out these questions.

(The group speaks simultaneously for five seconds)

Member 4: Were there any modifications?

Researcher: There was one separate (Special Education) classroom. What we did with them was extend it over two

periods so they would have time. They also could get it read to them.

Member 2: But, could they have it explained? There were some Special Ed kids, who when they read these things, they wouldn't understand.

Member 4: Not only that, but the print is…

Member 2: Don't you think so, number 3?

Member 3: No, I don't. I am thinking of…

Member 2: We just talked about some of these issues.

Member 3: No, if they don't understand something they would say something.

Member 2: Were they able to explain?

Researcher: There were no constraints on asking. This is not a graded test. To tie this up, go to pages 34, 35 and 36.

(Group makes random one or two word comments as they read.

Member 3: (whistles…) Wow. Every day.

Member 1: Yes, that is the cool thing, to be bored.

Member 2: When this says, no response. They just left it blank?

Member 5: No, it was a drop down. Were you bored because…

Member 2: But, if the work is not challenging enough, it should be a "no" or a "yes." But, this says, "no response."

Member 5: That is the same thing.

Member 2: How did they answer this?

Reseacher: Fill in the bubble.

Member 5: Check all of the ones that apply to you.

Researcher: I will check on that. I will ask (Dr. Yazzi-Mintz at the University of Indiana) why it is done that way.

Member 5: If you had to only pick one, it wouldn't work.

Member 2: Yes, but this says "no response."

Member 5: That is because they didn't put anything in that box.

Member 2: But, that is a lot of kids. You are talking about 70% on number 25. Why were you bored? The work wasn't challenging enough. 70% of the kids didn't even answer it.

Member 5: No, they picked something else for why they were bored.

They could have picked that the material wasn't interesting or relevant. They could have picked something else.

Member 2: OK, whatever you say.

Member 3: On number 25, versus, no interaction with teacher? The reason you are bored is because the teacher didn't interact with you. That was one of the questions and they didn't pick that.

(The group speaks simultaneously for five seconds)

Member 3: Discussion and debate.

Member 5: Wow, two Native Americans.

Member 1: You know our one who identifies herself that way.

(Pause while the group completes reading)

Member 8: Look at 27. No response to the opposite. There are two questions 27's, so if you doubled in "yes" for "English is the primary language" you are automatically a "no response" for "other."

Member 5: That is not quite the same.

Member 2: Whatever you say.

(Pause while the group completes reading)

Member 1: Some did not mark for ethnicity.

Researcher: They were given the option of not marking that. Once you have taken a look at the survey, the back of the report breaks down these responses, from page 39, by grade.

Researcher: I hope that we can get together again for a second focus group discussion because this is a huge amount to digest. I wondered, as we conclude here, if there are any other comments that anyone has.

Member 3: I want to know what excites them. Nothing. None of the choices are here that excites them. Except, teacher lecture is the best. Teacher lecture, some or very much. I

added those so that is 22%. Now, if you…now, I go down. Discussion and debate.

Member 5: Oh, that is the largest one.

Member 3: Which one? Discussion and debate?

Member 5: That is 66%.

Member 1: They like that. They don't have to do anything.

Member 5: We all like that.

Member 4: No basis, just opinion.

Member 1: And, off topic.

Member 4: But, passionate.

Member 1: Yeah, right.

Member 3: So, it is that. Discussion and debate.

Member 4: With passion.

Member 3: It is not writing projects, or research projects or group projects, or presentations, or role-play. Role-play?

Art and drama? Oh, they like art and drama.

Member 1: This probably aligns right up with kids who are signed up for theater arts.

Member 2: Who are in the musical?

Member 5: Oh, that would be 100%.

Member 8: OK, so for the critical questions. How do we use this data to individualize opportunities? How do we use this to enhance what they have learned?

Member 2: And, the answer is?

Member 8: The meaning of life. Here's specific stuff on…Ok, they don't like lecture and they like discussion and debate. They like role-playing. We could have probably guessed at a lot of these things.

Member 4: Not a surprise.

Member 8: OK. But, a lot of the other questions about being bored and relating to teachers and answering questions, and all that other stuff…it (speaker indicates the interview guide) asks what are the most effective ways to get the most bang out of your survey buck, you know, probably your target group are your "sometimes" kids. Your "no or never" are your negative kids, they are just going to do that. You've got the self-motivated kids that are cooking along. That middle group and particularly the lower middle, those are the kids. So, maybe you take a handful of these questions, and you, you know this is anonymous, and you find a way to get real kid-by-kid responses. Maybe at the teacher level they can ask these exact same questions just within their classes and the data goes no further than that

class. For some teachers, say 8b, that "some" group is your target group. That is how to get the most positive change with this information.

Member 3: But, it is in the school engagement, classroom engagement area that is your lowest percentage. If you want to take that and zero in on it in terms of the "some", and the questions (speaker indicates the interview guide) that link to these. In terms of the "some" kids, those "some" percentages, that is what you want to focus in on. Is that what you are saying?

Member 8: Yes, um hmmm.

Member 1: I would like to ask the question to the teacher sitting in that classroom, how important is it to have 100% of their students engaged in the activity that they plan for the day. As they are planning that activity, that presentation, or whatever they are doing, are they considering that it has to interest and motivate children or, am I doing this because it is the next topic in the book? I think our teachers are in a really good place because of the other data that looks at school climate and relationship. And, when students are asked if teachers care about you, if they want you to do a good job, there is a question that asks specifically about that, and then the

percentages are off the charts. Their teachers want them to do well. Now, what do the teachers have to do to address the needs of the students? Some of it comes back to the teachers, and I think that if they can be more creative, and that is what we have been discussing…how does the presentation of material have to change a little bit? Eric and I were just discussing, we have a teacher in the high school that, when the library was being cleaned out, went and grabbed all of the old filmstrips and the filmstrip projector. We can't get rid of it because the teacher claims it is important. Kids are looking at this and you want to say what do you need this for when you have the Internet? What could this filmstrip, that you can barely see, with people dressed as if it is 1952, offer you? If you want to engage kids, you have to engage kids.

Member 4: Maybe we should study what to do and what not to do.

Member 1: Well, I think part of this comes back to if teachers want to reflect on their practice, and that is one of our major themes this year, we want teachers to reflect on their practice. As they reflect on their practice, we want them to think about the future and the future citizens that they are preparing. How does this data help them move

to the next level? The survey seemed timely because it fit into the whole district initiative and it is a small piece and can help in the dialogue. So, we are at a good starting point, I think.

Member 2: Looking at the number 5 question on this interview guide, personally, the information from this survey is not something I would want to share with parents or community members.

Member 1: No, not now.

Member 2: Because it would…

Member 5: Well, the one thing. The one thing…

Member 1: Well, I am looking at the writing question, because we are going to have a writing meeting on Thursday morning with a parent. I am saying, "Gee, I would like to show her this." 75% plus of our kids you know, feel really good, but I am saying she is not going to focus on that. She is going to focus on the 8% who never feel good. So forget this data, I am not going to share it. So, for me, seeing that 75% of the kids saying they are well prepared by the time they exit our high school…I remember a day when those numbers were flipped. So, as a district we are doing a really good job.

Member 2: Right. But, I still think that going back to your point of 75% think we are doing a good job, what about that 25%?

Member 1: Correct.

Member 2: That is where our emphasis needs to be now.

Member 1: That is our challenge.

Member 2: Who are these kids that are feeling that we are not comfortable with writing strategies or they are not comfortable getting up and doing an oral presentation. And, as educators, in the classroom, are we letting these kids fall through the cracks?

Member 1: You know, #2, which is absolutely…I couldn't agree with you more. As a high school, we could multiply it district-wide; we could also bring it down to each individual teacher in his or her classroom with 22 kids sitting in front of them. So, if 24% of them are not doing a good job, are there four or five kids who are not having their needs addressed. And, I am sure there probably are.

Member 2: And, I have a feeling those kids are not the bottom kids and not the top kids. They are the kids in the grey area.

Member 1: They are the kids in the middle.

Member 2: They don't qualify for services and they are just out there.

Member 1: You are absolutely right.

Member 5: And, the parents concern often is that Special Ed kids' needs are taken care of, they are identified.

(Group speaks simultaneously for five seconds)

Member 3: That is why one of the major things we talked about this summer, in terms of differentiation of instruction, is huge. We did our own survey to find out at each level, at each building, do we do that well. We do not. According to everyone who gave input, it is something we need to continue to improve.

Member 2: Who gave input?

Member 3: You did and the PDC (Professional Development Committee, comprised of administrators, counselors and teachers). (Laughter)

Member 3: What really stood out was one of the biggest areas that had to do with that (differentiation). And, I do think that the models we are using fit beautifully into this (gestures toward the HSSSE report). Even the language, when you talk about student engagement and so forth. If teachers can start using that and thinking more about that in terms of the language of how do you engage kids. How do

you use that exact terminology, that language, so that everybody is talking about the same type of things? The Danielson Model (2007) works absolutely perfectly. There are two areas where we are lower than we should be (school engagement and classroom engagement) if it were 80% I would feel excited, across the board. I feel we should be pleased we do have those strong percentages in school climate and relationships. That is fantastic.

Member 1: That is a starting point. It is easy to address the other things because those things are so solidly in place.

We have accomplished that. Now, it is time to bring the other things to that same point.

Researcher: This was a very interesting conversation. I know we will probably talk about what comes next. I want to thank all of you for your time. I know this is a busy time. I hope that this was helpful in some way.

Focus Group Meeting Two

Conducted on: 08/21/07

Administrative Numerical Assignment and Role:

Member #1: Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and High School Principal

Member #8: Principal, Middle School

Researcher: I gave you the research questions because I think there were a couple of things that came up in our last focus group that were interesting and actually, you are number 1, there was a comment made with regard to the meeting you had today with the parents, where the kids are in the "some" area. They are good students and they are engaged but they are not necessarily turning over the way that they might.

I thought that was an interesting part of the conversation, that there were so many kids who were in a fairly, semi-motivated, doing well, but without a fire in their belly. We talked about different strategies in the classroom and how engaged the teacher might be in engaging the kids. What do you do about kids who are living in this area, going to a small school where they are known, but they are not necessarily motivated the way you would like them to be motivated?

Member 1: It is not the children that I saw today that I am thinking about at our earlier meeting. Apparently, that parent has a seventh grader who is not really motivated and the parent can't make that child be motivated. You know (names researcher) I am going to mention a name and you can erase it later. Her name is _____. If you stopped in

the diner this summer, _____ is working behind the cash register as the hostess, cashier. She's very sweet and she was that kind of child. She didn't really identify herself in any way. I'm not even sure she got any recognition. She did not get any recognition at the senior awards assembly. And, I put in that I wanted to give rewards to senior class officers because she was elected President of the senior class. Honestly, I don't know where she is going to college. I know where all these others are going and I don't know what she's doing with herself. She's a kid who can be extremely successful in life and I don't know if I've engaged her. She'll probably say positive things about our high school. So, how do I engage that child? I don't know if I have an answer. I know it is a need. I really do know it's a need and I watched her this summer, we went in a few times, and (names the Director of Guidance) and she said, "Who is that?" She's the President of the senior class, how could that happen? Um, I don't know.

Member 8: Was this a student who was comfortable and satisfied with flying under the radar like that?

Member 1: Was she comfortable? I don't know if she was comfortable not being recognized. I think she had

potential, let's put it that way. And, maybe she didn't want to exert herself. But, I think our job is to tap that potential and I am not sure that we did. And, I think the potential is there. For her to be elected President of the senior class meant there was either popularity or helpfulness or something…kids knew her somehow. You don't get elected to this office unless there is some way you've made a mark. I don't know her as an athlete. So, I don't know her as the top softball or volley…I don't know her as an athlete although she has been on all the teams. This is a kid that works. The parents were not involved in the school. If you asked me who her parents were…couldn't tell you. Couldn't identify them. But, she's…I hope that wherever she's going that it is going to be the right place and open the doors for her. Because, I wonder if we could have engaged her more. Maybe we didn't find her talent. Those are the questions I ask myself. And, does she have ability? Sure she does. I watched her in this work situation. I am not sure if when I graduated high school I would be as comfortable in that kind of environment dealing with people coming in and out. She's dealing with taking the money. She's very cordial and social with everyone and yet presenting herself very professionally. You know the

expression *she's older than her years*. I mean, she was a very mature presence in this role. She wasn't that way in school. She was just a kind of a kid. There's obviously something there that she is able to do. So, how do I engage that kid? I don't know. I don't have the answer yet. But, maybe in your research…

Researcher: As we look at 21stcentury skills and we move into re-designed programs, are we missing things, like interpersonal skills as an area to develop? She became the president of her class.

Member 1: Good question (names the researcher). I guess the quick answer is yes we are missing something in that. Obviously, she was elected and yet, we didn't use her. We didn't connect the role with the skills and give her the opportunity. Because, if you ask anybody about the senior class . . . Here's how it came to me. I got a call from the (names county) magazine back in the wintertime. They were doing the best high schools in (Names County) and they wanted one of our seniors, who represented our student body, for a photo shoot. So, I am wracking my brains, who should it be? So, who comes to mind (names the star of the high school musical). So, I am kind of wrestling with this and I go to (names the Director of Guidance). And I say,

"What do you think (names the Director of Guidance). I say, we use (names the star of the high school musical) for everything. She's the one who comes to mind. When I'm looking, it's (names the star of the high school musical), it's (names the top female science student). Those kids are coming to mind. So, (names the Director of Guidance) says, "Who's the President of the senior class?" So, I say, "I'll find out." So, I ask (names a senior teacher) and she tells me it is (names the President of the senior class). So, here we are in March and none of us know is the President of the senior class. So, I find out it's (names student) and I talk to (names student) and (names student) is so excited to go. Just so excited about this. So, I said, "You know (names Director of Guidance) you always go to these other kids that came to mind because these are the ones you know." I don't know. I don't know (names researcher) I feel for that kid because maybe, I was that kid. I was just kind of in the middle. Was I happy that no one looked at me, probably? Did I work after school, sure, every day. Work, that's what I did. But, I wasn't anyone making a difference in my high school for myself or others. We have to do more. I don't know the answer.

Member 8: You do hear a lot about employers criticizing colleges for producing students that don't have, whatever it is…can't write a memo at work. But, a lot of it is that they don't have interpersonal skills. At the middle school level, we see it. Go to graduation and some kids don't know how to shake your hand when they accept their award . . . eye contact when they talk. They come from different backgrounds. When we look at a student being the president of a class, they might have developed a rapport after years of being with that same age cohort of theirs. But, put them in a different situation, they don't know how to adapt. Really, what we are looking to do is to graduate kids and send them out into new situations with new kinds of people. It's, I think, the ability to adapt is what we really need to be looking for. As computers make the world look smaller and we frequently don't have to go places, we are looking at people from different cultures when we didn't used to. We are on the phone with people from India or from Asia, from Europe. I think we need more adaptability in how we teach interpersonal skills.

Researcher: One thing that occurs to me as I listen to both of you is that you are both successful. You are both leaders in a school district. You had what would be

considered for your generation to be a typical American experience. Differently, one a parochial experience…

Member 1: We are both from the same . . .

Researcher: Oh, you are both from parochial schools. So, what brought you to the point that you both have interpersonal skills? How does that differ from what might need to be done for students today to bring them into the global world?

Member 8: I think part of that is the age-old nature nurture argument. You know, it's the athlete. Sometimes you either have it or you don't. But, then there's all sorts of grey areas in between. Those who don't have it could lapse if they don't use it. Those that don't have it could work at it and make it serviceable. So, I think part of it is nature, you know? But, we are in the business of nurture. So, the real question is, for those who don't have it by nature, how we overcome that.

Member 1: How we overcome it is by creating opportunities for these very low skills in order to achieve a goal. Many may years later I reflected on my schooling and I joke about it now, but it was the early . . . mid 1960 is I went to a girl's Catholic high school in the Bronx. We had nothing. I look at this high school now. We had nothing .

. . like sports. It was a building in the Bronx for girls to go to school. And, yes, we had extracurricular things, we had a few. I joke with my friends and colleagues that the only things we had were things that don't cost any money. So, we couldn't have equipment. So, we had a debate team, a forensics society, a drama club (laughs). You had a person and a space and you did something. From freshman year to senior year I was part of the forensic society so I was . . . I did debate. I did public speaking. I did things like that. So, part of it, without knowing it then, and as I reflected on it, I had an opportunity to learn how to handle myself in groups that required communication. Because we were competing and doing things, I learned that. So, maybe my education, I didn't learn it from my family, none of my family is in a position that would require them to do this kind of thing. So, maybe it is nature, having the ability, and then ability and opportunity merge and something comes out. So, maybe my school actually did help as I had those natural abilities that matched what the school had to offer. But, no one thought of that before, it just kind of happened. I am thinking about kids, and why we say here, we have a lot of different things and it is a public school. And, we had a parent meeting this morning,

we spoke about that . . . we have to give a lot of opportunity. Whether it is the creative writer and we figure out how to do that, or the finance kid, and we figure out how to do that. But, it's thinking about different things that kids need, giving them opportunities to explore, and then trying to match those up with what we know the 21stcentury skills should be. So, the finance kid, what is he doing that could be kind of his interest? What is it that he could be doing to give him that global perspective which I know he needs?

Researcher: The question I have then is that if you are providing opportunities for students in the 21stcentury, and I think we are in concurrence about what that might be, communication skills, productivity, self-direction, and cultural awareness. Those kinds of things. How do you build those into a program redesign given the amount that has to happen in school as a result of NCLB?

Member 1: I will let (names the Middle School principal) start as I am taking too much time.

Member 8: I think with any . . . I think we have gotten over the hump as far as NCLB. We have gotten over the bucket of cold water that it was . . . that we . . . all these numbers we have to reach and thresholds. Schools are

still people organizations. No matter what the task is, it still comes down to people interacting. And, in our case, adults interacting with children. So, regardless of what the task is, if it is a debate club, or if it is classroom instruction, you still need a lot of the same skills. So, whether it is a field trip or whether we are taking the kids down the hall to lunch, or preparing for a state exam or building dioramas in class, that basic component of schools, adult interaction with children, is still there. And, that is what you focus on. Everything else is peripheral to the child/adult relationship, or can be.

Researcher: Speaking about that relationship, I had a conversation with a colleague about what creates real change in schools. And, my colleague said the only thing that really matters is the one-on-one relationship when an administrator takes some of the tension out of that relationship with that teacher and works directly with them on their practice. So that they can reflect, so that they can actually try some new things and slowly make the change. Um. Is that how you see it? You made the comment the other day (names the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and High School Principal) about whether the

teachers actually want to engage the kids. Is that the only way to go about it?

Member 1: Is the only way to go about it explaining and going one-on-one?

Researcher: To go teacher by teacher?

Member 1: That is a very big part of it (names the researcher). As you are saying that I am saying, those are really nice words, that is research-based, that sounds really sophisticated. And what I've always said is that change only happens through people. So, it doesn't matter what you write or what you do, nothing will change, transform or look different unless there's a human element that is going to make it work. Because, real change happens through people. As (names Middle School principal) said, we are a people organization. So, for anything to change here it has to happen through people. So, yes, one-on-one is important. Modeling . . . there is no one . . . with all of this there is just no one way. I think it is important to have that conversation one-on-one, but by the same token, to bring large groups together and share best research, best practices, look at data. Kind of get the wheels moving and let people know that we are going in a different direction but you do it in a lot of different ways. Then,

if there is one teacher that you really need to move . . . when we get back here (names researcher) please remind me to give you tape that was done in 1993 or four by (names the teacher who made the tape). It is only two or three minutes long, but I think it was talking about change and what we did then and how we transformed the school. (Names a math teacher) is in it. So, let me talk about (names the same math teacher) a minute. (Names the same math teacher) is the teacher who, or one of the teachers, I am going to give a lot of credit to for moving (names high school) to where it is today. Because she is the one, when I went to her and said, why (names the same math teacher) are we teaching, and at that time New York State had these things called consumer math, business math, whatever other kind of math, to satisfy math requirements, all very good. But, when I walked into classes and I watched the teachers teaching it . . . that is what I was teaching third and fourth graders. You know, like when there's a sale and there's 25% off, what do you pay? I mean, this is high school. You have high school kids. At that time you say, you just use a calculator to find out what it is when there is 25% off. You know, what do you get? It didn't make sense. So I said (names the same math teacher) why are we

doing that? And, (names the same math teacher) said, "Oh, because that's consumer math and this is what State's . . . " you know. She waved a book in front of me. You know (names the same math teacher). So, I said, here is what we want to do. So, we talked about moving it to Regent's math. What do you think? Can they all take Sequential One? Can they pass the Regent's? And (names the same math teacher) said very quickly, "Why not? I'm bored doing that stuff." So, I said, "If you're bored doing that stuff why are you . . . " So, she's waving this book in front of my face in typical (names the same math teacher) style, you know. And, (names the same math teacher) said, "Let's do it." And, she talks about this. And, so what your friend is sharing with you is absolutely…it was (names the same math teacher) sitting like this (indicates the seating relationship between the researcher and self) having a conversation. And then, sending (names the same math teacher) out. That is a good thing about our school, I only had (names the same math teacher) to deal with. She was the teacher teaching Sequential One. I didn't have five teachers whom I had to convince to buy-in to this. I had (names the same math teacher). To me, that was easy. That's how . . . you hear about what used to be and now, and now

used to be is getting to be ancient history. But, in order to make that change, years ago, I was fortunate in the structure of the school because it was a lot easier to pull the one Sequential One math teacher and say, "I want to do this" instead of having to convince five people. But, without the teacher, without the one-on-one, and saying we are going to the Board and we are throwing consumer math out, we are throwing this out and everyone is going to take the Regent's and their scores might dip. You know, and I need permission to do that. I need permission to…you know…we did all of those things. So, your friend is right. That is how…that is how an administrator can make it happen. There are factors that will contribute to it. Or, factors that will get in the way of its being accomplished. But, that one-on-one, eventually, is probably what has to be done. People making the change. You can talk about it, you can read about it, you can bring the experts in, and have the consultant, you can watch the TV shows, unless somebody is willing to take the risk, like (names the same math teacher) . . . you . . . I am going to share the tape with you. You can probably take some words from that and those people are still here. And, even if you needed to talk to (names the same math teacher) you know . . . she .

. . it's amazing. All of what we do in our middle school and high school math right now, if I had to simply attach it to somebody, I would attach it to (names the same math teacher).

Researcher: Interesting. So, it is a key teacher, essentially.

Member 1: (Names another math teacher) could never have done it.(Names this math teacher again) used to believe that there were bright kids and not bright kids.(Names this teacher again) believed in tracking.(Names the same teacher) only believed that some kids can do this and that is all you ask them to do. Whereas (names the original teacher spoken of) said, "Of course you can do this. Let's . . . " But, then you watch her operate. It's not only teaching the kids in the classroom. It's all of that other stuff. You know, sitting around, taking them out for pizza, bringing them to her house for a bar-b-q. It's like there is no formula. So, absolutely there is no formula. It's taking a key teacher and taking a risk on a belief system. And, it is interesting; I think there is another factor. And, this is a whole other research study. If you take (names both of the math teachers) and you as (names the original math teacher spoken of herein) who she was as a

high school student, a college student. (Names the original math teacher) struggled. She's bright. She learns differently. She struggles. She is a kid from the Bronx, who went to public schools in the Bronx, went to CCNY (City College of New York) as an engineering student in the early 1970's when women weren't doing this. And she was completely out of her league, she says. She says, which I think is a self-esteem problem. I don't believe she was, but she didn't believe she could do it. She will work so hard and says, "Math never came easy to me." And, look what she accomplishes. If you want hard data, you just look at what she does in a very unconventional and non-traditional way. But, she reaches the goal.(Names the second math teacher) on the other hand couldn't do any of that because he didn't understand. He just didn't understand.

Researcher: So, is the teacher in this new model of 21stcentury learning, the teacher that really goes out of their way to establish that relationship with the students outside of the subject area?

Member 1: It is relationship, flexibility. A teacher who is willing to throw out what the book says you should do and figure out that people learn in a lot of different ways. And the reason I tell you the (names the first math teacher

spoken of herein) doesn't learn in the conventional way. She struggled as a student through high school and college. It didn't come easy to her. So, she was able to figure out a way out herself to be accomplished in the subject. And, that allows her, because she looks at that lens for herself as a learner, to translate that into being a teacher. So, yeah, it is relationship, flexibility, creativity, it's sensitivity. You talk about differences in the world. That translates back to learning differences.

Member 8: I think they (teachers) have to be goal-oriented and they have to . . . they have to have a certain amount of passion for what they do and see their daily work as a career and not as a job. And, when that question comes, and when it's . . . that kid walks into your room and you are about to walk down the hall to the teachers' room and hang out for a little while . . . do you say, "Come back at period X" or, do you say, "Show me what you got?" It's that moment. Which type of teacher? When no one else is looking, what do they (teachers) do in that situation?

Member 1: That goes back to relationship (names researcher). So, (names the researcher) the answer is, yes. When teachers and students have this positive relationship,

they are going to support each other. And, that's a very good point.

Researcher: So, in terms of how academic rigor might be increased, you've looked at some of the data on the survey (researcher gestures toward the HSSSE survey report) and you have seen that there are a lot of kids in the "some" area. And, how do you increase the rigor? Kids who say, "I am bored." I know that's a kind of strange little area because the kids will say that. But, in other ways, their motivation level, the amount of effort they make. How do teachers encourage that? How do they increase the rigor? What is rigor?

What do you see as a need there?

Member 8: I think that whatever the scientific definition of force is, when you can apply some kind of intellectual challenge that forces them to whatever tool you are using. Whether it is a group project, or humor, or (gestures with hand) you want this "A" don't you?" Or, whatever the tool is. You can apply some kind of intellectual force. So, really what we are talking about is learning the language of the boredom. Why are they bored, and finding the key, which may be different for different kids. So, I think it is a matter of degree. I don't think you are ever going to

get to the destination. And, what I think we are continually looking to do is to strive to get closer to finding more and more of those communication keys for the kid in the front row…what motivates him or her? What motivates this one? I think it is an on-going process.

Member 1: If you need an answer as to how do you increase the rigor and what is that, and what does it mean? I think that it goes back to the person. I think each teacher has to learn reflective practice and many of them have it. These schools of education are building that into their teacher training programs. If it doesn't come naturally to the teachers we have on staff that is going to be our biggest challenge, because there are some teachers who don't reflect on their practice and ask themselves, "Is this difficult enough?" To celebrate that all kids did very well, that's great. You can say, all kids did very well, I got my point across, I taught them. But, you can also say, all kids did very well; did I ask challenging enough questions? Or, should it be a little more challenging? Is the question open-ended enough? Is the task open-ended enough? Did it allow for creativity? If I want it to be rigorous, I want to make sure that I have opened it up and that it allows for creativity for kids to come up with

crazy ideas that they can then go out and test. That's what I want them to do. So, it is different for every kid, and so I agree with (names the middle school principal). It comes back to the teacher. So, we need to help the teachers reflect about their practices.

Researcher: In terms of where you are now with the teachers whom you know where the school is . . . and, we are here with the principal of the middle school and principal of the high school and assistant superintendent for curriculum, so, you have a very broad view between you. So, what does the school look like in two years, four years or six years? Where are you going?

Member 1: (Names middle school principal) is already on that!(Laughter) He's been spending his last week thinking about that.

Member 8: That is a vast question. I think, again, going back to the personnel, if the end result is to have a rigorous program, or graduate kids at a certain level, or whatever the goal may be . . . I think the kids need to feel, and I think some of the questions in the survey (gestures toward the HSSSE survey report) that allude to this . . . the kids need to feel that the school and the people in it care about them and relate to them...that the

students find the teachers, as people, interesting. I find it extremely gratifying when a parent tells me that a student was talking about school at dinner. That the student brought something up. If they are talking about school outside of school, involuntarily, you've found that key. You've found something. You've struck some kind of chord. So, I think getting the staff to value that connection and value the impact that they have on kids, which can be very substantial . . . people that the kids will remember into their adulthood and tell their friends about . . . you know, "I used to have a teacher that…" If the teachers in the building recognize this impact and as part of their daily mission try to establish and nurture that positive affect and make themselves an adult resource for that student, as opposed to simply being the sixth period science teacher. That is what I would like the staff to look like in several years.

Member 1: My lofty goal goes back to your first question. Which is that I think we have given opportunity to the self-motivated, high-achieving kids and because they ask for it, it is easy to find something and give it to them. And, I do believe that we have a lot of different opportunities in place for children who need either

extended rigor or academic intervention. One way or another, whether it is a mandated program or a local program, I think we have done that and have looked at it. I think and hope that in two years, that middle group of kids has become more of an active participant in our school. And, what often falls into my middle group of kids, and maybe this is something I need to think about more...I think about it every year and then it kind of goes on the side burner...but, it is children who enter our school from different places, whether it is other schools or other countries, and they come into our school and they never really get involved with the life of the school. Because we tout the kids who are on our athletic teams, and we look toward the musical and theater productions, and we get so excited about the kids who are involved in that. But, if we really examine it, and I think in this study (indicates the HSSSE survey report) there are some questions that ask about those kinds of activities, that the numbers are a constant and it is about a third of the population, or a little more, but they are the same kids in all of those activities. And, we do tout that. And we say the football player is on the stage. But, it is always the same child. And, I think there is a whole group of kids . . . and, I

think a young woman who was the senior class president is an example, as are children who have immigrant parents and come into the school. They are not participating in the life of the school. Now, are they happy? Maybe this is what they want. Perhaps. But, I am not sure that they have been given the opportunity to get beyond that stage. Or, maybe one of their friends pulled them along and said, "Hey, you could do this too. Why not try it out?" So, I think I would like to see that those opportunities that are outside of the classroom are . . . more children who are different or represent different populations in our school are involved and that it is not always the same one third. There is a whole population who are not actively participating in activities outside of the classroom.

Researcher: At different times, I have heard you speak about real changes in the construction of the school day and possibly even the year, that might bring about a connection with all of those kids who are not always as available to the match between what is in the school already and who they are. You have talked about extending the day beyond 2:45 PM and having activities that go later and are a little bit different. In our last focus group, I think it was you (names the middle school principal) . . .

I think you brought up that if the survey (indicates the HSSSE survey report) had been given after the internship (reference to senior internships which take place at the conclusion of the academic year) they might have had a different response to the real world nature of education . . . or, the link between education and the real world.

Member 1: Sure. Sure.

Researcher: So, in the near future is it possible to do things, like make the internship earlier in the year so that the kids have a period of schooling after the internship to digest what they have experienced, or discuss it? Are those things a possibility given the State?

Member 1: It goes back to your research questions. (Gestures toward the research questions and indicates question 2) I would like to say that everything is a possibility. Because there are requirements needed for graduation, sometimes it is not. But, that doesn't mean that we can't re-think how we get kids to take the required examinations that they need. I would like to think way out of the box and then come back to something that is reasonable. What I have been talking about a lot is something I think… a four-year high school shouldn't exist anymore. I think that there should be a three-year high

school or a five-year high school. I think some kids need more time to get through high school. It is really what colleges have evolved into. There are kids who need to take fewer classes, study, do well, study in-depth. If the goal . . . and as (names the middle school principal)said it has to be goal-oriented . . . if the goal is to get your high school diploma and move on to post-secondary education, and if that is five years and we have to re-design the way you do that, that's fine. There is no problem there. And, there are some kids who really don't need to be here for four years because they have done everything. They need to get out to the world. So, the answer is, do they leave us and go off to college? Or, do they have what we now call the fifth year as the fourth year, where there really is an externship maybe, and they are just not here. Maybe they satisfy some of their requirements for that fourth year of English and that fourth year of social studies out in the world. I think all of those are possibilities. It's different to convince people. To do that in some communities is harder to do. I think if I was back in New York City it would be easier to do. You can take that kind of risk and you can have more opportunity to do it and people are more… you have more supports to do things like

that. Here, I think we do things very conservatively and a risk means, that's great and it's a great idea, but wait until my kid gets into Harvard, and then you can play with that nonsense. I feel… I feel that this idea is not as much out of the realm of reality as it used to be five years ago. Because, I am hearing from reading the Partnership for the 21stCentury and from reading about the summits that Bill Gates ran with the school leaders, that there needs to be a change a little bit in how we prep our kids. So, are there half of our kids who are all finished high school at the end of their junior year? And, we've pushed things down over the years. Where those kids who are bright… more capable, they are doing high school work in middle school. So we… but, we haven't changed high school. So, we push it down earlier but we haven't done anything at the other end to say, "Ok, you can continue to be accelerated." So, now what?

Member 8: I think that really speaks to taking a much finer look at the individual student, the individual graduate. Three year may be appropriate for one, five year may be appropriate for another. In looking at our internship, we do have a brief de-briefing after the internship. Something longer might be valuable, but for some of the kids, to

bring them back after they have already gone off into the real world wouldn't be productive, for some of them. They are ready and might have been ready for a long time. Others, maybe it didn't go well and they need to come back and analyze and re-think and be reflective and maybe re-apply at another time. So, some way to take a more personal approach and take a little more time, and be more flexible, for their benefit.

Member 1: Those are two really good words. Personal approach and flexibility. And, as you look to the 21stcentury, you say our workers need to have that to be successful in the economy that they are going to work in. But, I think in order to model that, if we don't change, how are we going to change the mindset of the children who are going to enter the world? It is going to be like culture shock for them to go through this and then be out there. And, I like those two words. I think that if we hold onto those two words as we plan and we bring it back to the classroom and ask teachers to hold onto those two words as they look at their children, as they look at their subject, look at what they have to do each year. And, always come back and say, "Am I personalizing it? Am I being flexible in my thinking and my approach?" I think we

will do different things. And, those two simple words have to somehow continue to infuse into our practice, into our language. I think that little by little you get teachers to jump on board. We aim for 100% and each year you add a few more people. This is an exciting year for us, not only because we are re-structuring the physical plant. We hired a significant number of new personnel and they are different kinds of people. They are coming either from different walks of life or they are coming to education as a second career or, they are coming out of the Teaching Fellows program in New York City. I think that the people we are bringing in are really interesting. These teachers we are bringing our of the New York City Teaching Fellows program... they are really different. They have only been teaching two years and they went right from college to teaching, but it is a different approach because they weren't in college preparing to be teachers. They were in college and they dug deep into their content. They are very interesting individuals. They learned in a large department of education with good mentoring going through a Master's degree, almost like a resident doctor whose learning on the job with some really skilled people around him or her. And, they are coming to us with enthusiasm . . . they are

articulate. They are creative. They are flexible. That's kind of what we looked at, or looked for when we started bringing some people in. So, I think this year we have an opportunity. And, if we don't jump on that opportunity . . . I think it is the beginning of a new transition. And, our Board is willing to take a little bit of a risk as we move through, our superintendent believes in risk. So, we can pilot or try things. I think it is going to happen this year or next. We are going to have people who drive it in different ways. You know the people who left. If you think of the people who left and if you think of the people who are coming in to replace just those people who had 35 years each. Together they had over 100 years of employment. It's exciting.

Researcher: I have one final question and then any comments, or anything like that. Just going back to the survey (indicates the HSSSE survey report). Is there any thought about actually sharing any of the survey data with teachers?

Member 1: Yes. What I liked, and I don't remember where it was, when we looked at it at our first meeting (reference to the preceding focus group discussion) having kids engaged in class and finding that . . . There was a group

of questions and I would like to go back and outline them . . . we will start with the Chairs (reference to the departmental chairpersons) because for me the chairs are the ones who help re-direct curriculum and present it. So, the answer is yes. I would like to . . . I will pull some sections out that are particular to me and I think might help us as we move the chairs forward. But, the answer is yes. We will give this to the chairs and they can start the conversation with their departments about what is happening in our classrooms. So, yes, they can start the dialogue. [Some discussion takes place, at this point in the interview, that is related to district matters only and was therefore not included in this transcript.]

Member 8: I am very glad you asked this question because I was thinking about this last night. Because, for the first and only time, I saw Drew Carey's new game show *The Power of Ten.* Which if you haven't seen it, they bring a contestant up and they pose a question. How many Americans think there should be, a, you know, a cap on the driving age for elderly people. And, you have to guess what percentage of American people you think think that. They have a scale that goes up and down. And, sometimes when the percentage comes out, you are very surprised. I think that

there are some numbers in here (indicates the HSSSE survey report) that . . . seriously, if I posed it to a faculty like this, "How do you think . . . what percentage of your students think this?"

Member 1: That is a great way to present it because everyone . . . I have seen the advertisements, but I haven't seen the show.

Member 8: Especially what I thought were the surprises (reference to the HSSSE data) may not be to other people. But, if we just pick a few, I think it would be great food for thought and a way to start a conversation. And, I think it would give you a great view as to your perception question. "I never thought this was a problem," or, they are on top of it. So, actually I was thinking about that last night. Take a couple of these . . .

Member 1: Oh, (names the middle school principal) everyone always responds to the popular cultures and this is the way *Jeopardy* was a few years ago. Now, every classroom does classroom *Jeopardy*. People are on top of this now and I think that's a great way of presenting it (reference to the HSSSE data) in that role-play and asking them what they think and giving them the data. That's wonderful. And, I know that the Chairs will be really interested in this. And

then they in turn will take that to their departments, and when they sit like this, in a more comfortable situation, they can kind of let their hair down and talk honestly about their departments and where they want to go. It (reference to the HSSSE data) will help move them in that direction. I think it is exciting (names researcher) and we can use it. I want to share this (holds up the HSSSE report) with (names the superintendent) tomorrow because he asked me how the meeting went (reference to the first focus group interview) and he apologized for having to run out, but I think if he sees the research questions he will at least know what the focus of this is. And, he will be able to see . . . I kept saying to him it is wonderful, and the data is really helpful and will fit into our plans here in the district. But, I wasn't more specific than that. So, I will share this with him tomorrow and tell him that I invited you to a meeting of the department chairs so that you can see, come as an observer, nothing more than that. And, so the message is; here is what we are doing, you are the leaders and we want you to have the information before anyone else does. And, it is 21stcentury goals, and the Danielson Model (2007), enhancing professional practice,

and all of that goes to engaging children and why do we want to engage kids? It fits all together.

Researcher: Thank you for your time, I think we are done.