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UNDERSTANDING CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Educational Doctorate  
in Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

JASON W. WOOD

May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the dynamics of student engagement and motivation in middle school students. The action research method involves collecting quantitative data through a student survey first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data through interviews and focus groups. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, the motivation and engagement scale data will be collected from middle school students in the fifth through eighth grade of Regents School of Oxford to test the motivation and engagement of these students to assess whether intrinsic motivations relate to classroom student engagement. The second qualitative phase will be conducted as a follow-up to the quantitative results to help explain the reasons for motivation and engagement. In this exploratory follow-up the tentative plan is to explore student engagement through focus groups with middle school students who participated in the Motivation and Engagement Survey Profile. These focus groups will provide clarity around the reasons why students tend to lose motivational excitement about school and begin to show behavioral disengagement from class.

## DEDICATION

To Erin, my loving wife, who has supported me through all my educational endeavors and from whom I have learned more about education than any coursework completed. I am indebted to her wisdom, love, and support for this work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have received a great deal of support and assistance. I would first like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Douglas Davis, whose expertise was invaluable in formulating the research questions and methodology. Also, I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Jill Cabrerra, Dr. Dennis Bunch, and Dr. Scott Kilpatrick. The committee's feedback encouraged me to think deeply about the motivation and engagement of students. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues at Regents School of Oxford for their feedback and collaboration. Without their thoughtful and reflective feedback, I could not have completed my dissertation process over the past three years. Their collaboration has blessed the continuous improvement efforts at the school. In addition, I would like to thank my wife for her wise counsel and sympathetic ear. You are always there for me.

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CHAPTER I:  
INTRODUCTION

As an elementary student, the excitement of beginning a new school year and the joy of purchasing school supplies in the fall can be a motivating activity. This excitement stems from an intrinsic desire to learn and be taught by a teacher who was passionate about learning. As a student develops into a young teen, the joy of learning can turn into drudgery and the demands of the classroom became oppressive rather than exciting, fulfilling, and joyful. What caused the demise of their educational experience, and why is this dynamic mirrored by so many other students that now walk the halls of American schools?

**The Statement of the Problem**

The need for student engagement in the classroom is a growing concern within American education and can be readily seen in the context of Regents School of Oxford. Although the reason for student apathy within our educational setting is complex, multifaceted, and challenging to define, it is evident by the time a student reaches middle school, the dynamic of apathy has taken hold in the heart of the student (Marshall, 2014; Raffini, 1986). The problem evident in the classroom is that as a student transitions from elementary school to middle school, the student's educational engagement decreases as the apathetic attitude toward education tends to increase. These students typically perform well on standardized tests and classroom assignments; however, there is a growing concern these students will not be motivationally ready for college-level coursework as they progress through middle school and high school (Bourgeois

& Boberg, 2016). The dynamic of growing disengagement and apathy in fifth to sixth grade students lead to unmotivated learners who do not reach their full educational potential.

Understanding why student apathy is occurring is essential because at the heart of the educational process is the need to develop motivation, curiosity, and passion for learning (Duckworth, 2016). As we work to educate our students, the underlying goal is to create a motivation to learn throughout the student's lifetime. Teaching should create a context in which the student is inspired to learn beyond the requirements of the classroom and be self-motivated to know more about our world (Babbage, 1998). Also, the educational process should foster curiosity in the mind of the student, which drives the process of gaining wisdom and knowledge. The development of curiosity as the driving force of education is the motivation necessary for life-long learning. Finally, education should instill a passion for knowledge within the heart of the student (Martin, 2013). This passion will drive their calling in life and create within them a strong work ethic as they participate in society to make a better world (Duckworth, 2016).

The educational process seeks to instill the value of engagement, curiosity, and motivation into the heart of the student. However, the research shows students are driven by external forms of motivation such as grade performance, class status, standardized testing performance, parental expectations, and college admission (Raffini, 1986). Given the struggle to engage students beyond these external motivations, educational expectations have been lowered in our society (Gatto, 2005). Research reveals (Chamberlin & Matejic, 2018; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Legault, Green-Deemers, & Pelletier, 2006) students lack motivation and engagement for three main reasons. First, students lack motivation because of various internal struggles affecting the overall ability of the student in the classroom. Second, students lack engagement because of poor teaching strategies (Hughes, 2011; Scales, Pekel,

Sethi, Chamberlin, & Van Boekel, 2019; Scott, Hirn, & Alter, 2014; Vidourek, King, Bernard, Murnam, & Nabors, 2010). And third, students lack motivation and engagement because of cultural issues arising out of the policies and procedures established by school leadership squelching the learning process (Lazowski & Hulleman, 2016; Raffini, 1986; Renschler, 1992). There is a clear gap in the research identifying the intrinsic reasons why students lose academic motivation through the middle school years. The data has primarily focused on external solutions to determine how to engage students. This current research project seeks to understand the intrinsic dynamics leading to student engagement or apathy.

Finally, this study is necessary to address the falling educational standards in the current school culture of Regents School of Oxford. Research shows (Babbage, 1998; Gatto, 2005; Martin, 2016; Raffini, 1988) the standard of assessment and educational expectations in American education have changed over the past few decades. Many schools are not immune to the pressure of lowering the bar of educational standards for our students, and a thorough study of student engagement, teaching practices, and educational standards is necessary to ensure we have calibrated our expectations based on the needs of the student rather than the cultural pressure of success and self-esteem. The benefit of this process will be enhanced teaching to ultimately fulfill the mission of the school and thereby educationally serve the students and families of the Regents community.

### **Description of Location**

As the Head of School at Regents School of Oxford, my primary role of leadership is to ensure the mission of the school is realized at all levels in service to the families enrolling their children. The mission of Regents School of Oxford, aspiring to be the leader in classical Christian education, is to disciple our students to love, serve, and glorify God to become godly

men and women through a classically driven, gospel-centered school. Our teachers are committed to rightly using the inherent tools of learning, cultivating a challenging and joyful environment encouraging our students to think logically and communicate their conclusions persuasively.

Regents School of Oxford was established in 1999 as a private Christian school committed to providing a classical and biblically based education. Education at Regents is intended to be inherently different in philosophy and content striving to operate as an extension of the family with the belief that education of young people is the responsibility of parents. The school provides a biblically based curriculum and teaches all subjects as part of an integrated whole with the Scriptures at the center. In addition, the goal of the school is to prepare young men and women to think clearly and listen carefully with discernment, to reason persuasively, and to be able to evaluate their entire range of experience in the light of developing wisdom and knowledge. The desire of the school is to have the students recognize cultural influences and be well-prepared in all situations, possessing discernment, prudence, and intellectual curiosity. In addition, it is the desire of the school that students are socially kind and spiritually gracious, equipped with the understanding of the tools of learning, and possessing a desire to grow in their academic endeavor by embracing education as a calling worthy of hard work and effort.

The aim of Regents is to encourage our parents to hold a sense of responsibility for the school by ensuring parents are well informed about the goals of Christian education. The hope is parents grow with the school, as well as to be involved in and excited about the journey of learning with their children. Regents is a covenant model school; therefore, at least one parent must have a Christian testimony and adhere to the statement of beliefs held as a school. Primarily, the families of Regents come from the upper-middle-class section of the socio-

economic spectrum, and many hold professional occupations. Regents is a tuition-driven school and provides financial aid for a small portion of our families. Of the 233 students, 12% receive financial aid of some sort. In addition, 22% are the children of faculty or staff who receive a tuition benefit as part of their compensation for working at the school. Demographically, the school is 93% Caucasian, five percent African American, one percent Asian, and one percent other.

Regents School of Oxford emphasizes the grammar, logic, and rhetoric stages of development in the educational process of the school. The grammar stage is to be understood as the fundamental rules and data of each subject, which is focused on in kindergarten through fifth grade. The logic stage refers to the ordered relationship of particulars in each subject, which is the focus of the middle school years. Furthermore, the rhetoric stage is how the grammar and logic of each subject may be expressed clearly. The overall purpose of the school is for a student to know what they believe (grammar of a subject), to understand why they believe it (logic of the subject), and have the ability to argue through winsome persuasion with wisdom and eloquence (rhetoric of the subject). Students are learning how to think as the grammar and logic of a subject matter are mastered and the student is equipped to articulate their understanding.

With the application of the classical methodology, the school will encourage every student to develop a love for learning and to fulfill their full academic potential. The teacher should be excited about the subject matter they teach, and this excitement should inspire the student to learn. Necessity may require the student to learn the material; however, it will not truly enable them to love the subject matter. If they do not enjoy it, they will lower their effort to some minimum standard. The issue of apathy is found in a teacher who also is content with minimum standards. A teacher who is excited about the subject they teach will be extremely

sensitive to those students who are seemingly bored. If this goal is successfully reached, then the student will spend the rest of their life with a genuine love of learning they developed during their time at Regents School of Oxford.

As a student transitions from elementary school to middle school, their educational engagement decreases as the apathetic attitude toward education tends to increase. These students typically perform well on standardized tests and on classroom assignments; however, there is a growing concern these students will not be motivationally ready for college-level coursework as they progress through middle school and high school. The dynamic of growing apathy in fifth to sixth grade students lead to disengaged learners who do not reach their full educational potential, nor do they realize the full measure of the mission as a school. How do we move a non-reflective consumer who is fundamentally unmotivated to become a vibrant, engaged, intrinsically passionate student who is eager to learn?

The role as Head of School is to inspire the teachers to embody the mission of the school, so that in turn, they may shape the hearts of the students. The nature of this research is to determine the best way to foster an environment to change and improve so that students might be able to embrace life-long learning. As the Head of School, the primary responsibility is to ensure students are appropriately engaged in classroom activities that will drive the mission statement of the school and our purpose for education. In addition, Regents is accredited by the Mid-South Association of Independent Schools and Cognia (formerly AdvancEd). This dual accreditation places Regents in an association with other schools similar in size, mission, and vision. The issues of student apathy can be clearly seen not only in the local community of Regents but also within the broader community of MSAIS schools. The scope of this research will not merely

address the concerns at Regents but will explore the impact upon the broader community of Mississippi schools that are searching for ways to engage middle school students.

### **Justification of the Problem**

The research shows that academic motivation and engagement decrease over time as a student moves into their middle and high school years (Legault, Green-Deemers & Pellitier, 2006; Anderman & Midgley, 1998). The reasons for this dynamic are numerous, and several researchers have sought to understand the phenomenon better. The lack of motivation in a student can result from maladaptive practices, which can result in anxiety, avoidance failure, disengagement from class, and, in most extreme cases, self-sabotage (Martin, 2013). The adaptation of these skills can have a negative, life-long impact on the trajectory of the child's life. If we are able to equip students with the ability to be self-motivated and choose quality engagement activities, then they will value learning, develop persistence, learn to focus, have quality self-belief, and be able to problem solve. Equipping a child with the ability to be self-motivated should be the curriculum that lies beyond the curriculum, so they are equipped for the workplace and a flourishing career. It is imperative schools determine the best ways to teach motivation and engagement as a skill rather than as an outcome, so the student will understand focus, persistence, and diligence are more attainable.

Within the context of Regents School of Oxford, students have every advantage to succeed in school and well beyond; however, from the observations of the students, there is a genuine difference between the excitement and curiosity of the younger learners in relation to the middle school students. As the administrators of the schools have reviewed the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) data from the past five years, the kindergarten through fifth grade has performed at a grade level above their current grade equivalency. As these students progress into

middle school, this dynamic tappers off. In the past, leadership has attributed this dynamic to poor teaching, a weak curriculum, or a lack of vibrancy in the middle and high school culture. However, the dynamic is more complex than asking teachers to teach better than in the past. There seems to be a cultural dynamic needing to be explored to understand better why students disengage from the educational process and lose that natural curiosity and excitement.

In addition to these SAT scores, the parent and student satisfaction surveys have been very high in the elementary years of the student's experience, while the same surveys have revealed lower confidence levels in the overall impact of the upper school education of Regents. This past year the most recent student satisfaction survey indicated a potential increase in the overall satisfaction of the upper school students; however, the general trend of our school shows a lack of confidence in the efficacy of the upper school faculty. The student satisfaction survey results highlight a loss of confidence in our upper school and inversely affects the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom.

The most revealing data involving motivation and engagement are the attrition rates of our students from fifth to sixth grade over the past five years. Clearly, this is a point of demarcation for parents to decide to send their children to other public schools in the area. In most cases, there is low (less than 5%) attrition in each class, while the typical attrition of the fifth grade year will be anywhere from 10-15%. This dynamic drastically affects the overall motivation and engagement of Regent's students, as well as the confidence of the parents on the educational impact of the upper school. Although the parent began with the intent to move their students from the school once this age has been attained, it is clear the motivation and engagement of our students are significantly impacted by this high attrition point. The loss of confidence in our educational model is a deterrent for highly motivated and engaged students.



Within the tenth grade history class of Regents, the dynamic of apathy is at work as these students serve as a prime example of how motivation and engagement could impact the overall experience of the students. The students who struggle academically are clearly the most engaged and work the hardest. Conversely, the brightest students within the class display apathy, disengagement, and are particularly unmotivated. In this situation, the students who have put in the hard work, given their all to the educational process, and have diligently sought to learn will score lower ACT/SAT scores but will have gained a work ethic. However, those who have sought to provide the minimal level of effort will perform well on standardized tests, will make good grades, and will enter the colleges they desire; however, there is a concern these students will not be ready for the college level of academic rigor given their lack of motivation and engagement. Essentially, the purpose of this study is to better understand why this dynamic is taking place in the classroom. The project seeks to determine the primary reasons students are disengaged or struggle to remain engaged and motivated in the classroom.

### **Significance of the Study**

The current research project will address the issue of student apathy in the classroom and provide insight for teachers, administrators, parents, and students to understand the dynamics of motivation and engagement of students. The research will be applied to the problem that students struggle with apathy, disengagement, and lack of motivation. The data drawn from this study will provide practical resources to aid the educational community in the process of understanding the academic journey and the tools necessary for a flourishing life.

First, the study will provide insight for teachers to understand better how to foster motivation and engagement in the classroom environment. The data gathered from the Motivation and Engagement Tool will identify the problem found in the motivational aspects of

students in the classroom. This information will be helpful as a program is designed to enhance curriculum, foster a classroom environment, and encourage vibrant teaching practices in the classroom.

Second, the program will address the needed data for administrators to develop a focus on academic priorities for the school culture. Administrators have a number of decisions to make in regard to the daily culture of a school, and the data will guide in making decisions to prioritize the most critical aspects of the academic culture. By understanding the dynamics motivating and inspire students, the administration will be able to anticipate the effects of their policy decisions better.

Third, the study will provide self-reflection for students to understand better how to choose to be motivated and engaged in the classroom. The most significant outcome of the study would be to the benefit of students who could be equipped with the tools necessary for life-long learning. The students will gain insight into the positive and negative types of motivation and engagement, will better understand the nuances of apathy, and be inspired to make different academic decisions as they approach their education.

Fourth, the study will provide tools for parents working with students who struggle with maladaptive tendencies toward their schoolwork. The overall purpose of the research provides strategies for struggling students in order to enhance their educational experience. Parents, teachers, and administrators will be able to utilize this information to support students who lean toward disengagement, self-sabotage, and a lack of self-confidence. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to encourage students to build resilience and persistence in their educational endeavors, to encourage the development of a strong work ethic, and to foster motivation and engagement in the student.

## **Explanation of the Research Model**

An applied research model seeks to identify an apparent problem of practice in the educational setting and present a data-informed solution to the stated problem for the purpose of continuous improvement within the institution. The problem clearly seen in the culture of Regents School of Oxford focuses on the apparent apathy in the students who develop through the middle school ages. Two dynamics are evident in the life of a student within the classroom; motivation, which are the internal attitudes of the student, and engagement, which is the behaviors flowing from the student's motivational attitudes. The problem within the school is that highly motivated fifth graders tend to lose their motivation and subsequently their engagement in the classroom throughout the process of middle school. There are several reasons for this dynamic in the classroom, and within this applied research model, the program to be developed will identify the main problems related to the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom and provide an action plan to improve and encourage both the student's motivation to learn and the behaviors of student engagement in the process of learning.

Through the collaboration of the administration, school board, teachers, and parents, the dynamics surrounding poor motivation and engagement can be addressed. As these key stakeholders better understand the ways in which motivation and engagement are instilled into the heart of the learner, the learning environment will reflect quality student improvement in the classroom. Over the twelve-month implementation of the motivation and engagement program, students will have the opportunity to identify their common educational engagement behaviors and describe their honest, educational attitudes regarding motivation.

After the implementation of the applied research program, the evaluation process will collect and assess the motivation and engagement perceptions of each student through the

Motivation and Engagement Survey Profile (MES), student focus groups, and teacher focus groups. The MES will be administered before and after the program in order to understand better the impact of the program on the motivational attitudes and engagement behaviors of the students. This evaluation process will address primary questions about how to continue the improvement of student motivation so students can thrive in an educational environment.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to clearly understand how to improve and encourage the motivation (attitude) and engagement (behaviors) of students in the classroom. The outcomes of this study will provide direction for teachers in the process of engaging and motivating students in order to enhance the academic culture of the school. In order to understand the dynamics of student engagement and motivation in middle school students, an applied research design will be used identifying key factors contributing to motivation and engagement, then creating a program to address the student apathy in the classroom. This program ensures collaboration with critical stakeholders of the school to ensure continuous improvement of the institutional practice. In the evaluation of this student engagement program, student focus groups with middle school students who participated in the Motivation and Engagement Survey Profile will be utilized to better understand the dynamics leading to student apathy and disengagement. These focus groups will provide clarity around the reasons why students tend to lose motivational excitement about school and begin to show behavioral disengagement from class. *Research Questions*

Several questions will drive the process of addressing the problem of student apathy in the classroom throughout the middle school years. These questions stem from the outlined areas of research reviewed and primarily address if classroom engagement is affected by supportive relationships on campus, vibrant teaching techniques, and school culture as created through the

process of implementing policies and procedures for the students. The research will address the following questions:

Central Question: How can the school improve the motivation (attitudes) and engagement (behaviors) of middle school students?

Element One: Formative

- a) What factors encourage student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Will types of classroom teaching practices and activities improve motivation and engagement for middle school students?

Element One: Summative

- a) Did students report classroom technology improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Did students report the Socratic Teaching method improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Element Two: Formative

- a) Do supportive relationships with teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom?

Element Two: Summative

- a) Did students report a mentoring program with teachers improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Did students report a guidance counselor improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Element Three: Formative

- a) Does the adjustment of school policies and procedures affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom?

#### Element Three: Summative

- a) Did students report reshaping the grading policies and procedures improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Did teachers report reshaping the teacher observation protocol to focus on student engagement improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

### **Overview of Study**

It is vital our educational institutions have a clear understanding of what motivates a student to learn and how we can create the best environment for a student to be engaged in education. In the context of Regents School of Oxford, the mission statement clearly states a desire to encourage and instill the love of learning into the hearts of our graduates. Without a clear understanding of how to encourage motivation and engagement, this mission cannot be accomplished. Therefore, in Chapter One of this study, the problem of motivational and engagement loss throughout the middle school years is clearly articulated and describes the need for a research study to address the motivational issues surrounding the learning process. In Chapter Two, this study reviews the literature focused on student motivation and engagement and provides three main categories of potential interest to address motivational issues. These main categories are internal student issues such as depression and anxiety, teaching strategies and techniques affecting a vibrant classroom environment, and school culture shaped by policies and procedures affecting student motivation. In Chapter Three of this study, a clear action plan is developed comprehensively addressing the areas of research covered to see if student

motivation and engagement are affected by vibrant teaching, supportive teacher relationships, and clarity of school culture emphasizing student engagement.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Given the problem of student apathy, engagement, and motivation in the middle school years at Regents School of Oxford, a thorough research review was necessary to build a quality program to address the fifth to eighth grade transition. Because of the expanse of research available, it is essential to explore the various facets of motivation and engagement in the classroom. The applied research program will need to address the multi-faceted nature of the classroom dynamic between the student, teacher, and culture of the school. Through the review of research, three main categories of study have emerged relating to student apathy, engagement, and motivation. These branches of research can be categorized as internal student-centered issues, pedagogical strategies and techniques, and cultural shaping influences upon the environment of the school. Many research studies explore the interactions between these three branches and draw correlations between the culture, the student, and the teacher. The applied research program is built upon the research findings as it applies to the nature of the problem, the development of the action plan model, the exploration of evaluation tools, and the continued need for research in this area.

Student-centered studies typically examine the internal motivations and struggles of the student. These studies primarily address why a student would be distracted, not care, and stop trying in their academic endeavors. These researchers are examining the issues of passion, perseverance, and endurance in the character development of the child as they experience the transition from childhood through adolescence.



The studies focusing on the pedagogical strategies and techniques typically examine the ability of the teacher to engage the student through the act of teaching and also focus on the relationship formed between the teacher and student. These studies address how a teacher can foster a vibrant, exciting, and energetic teaching experience to engage the apathetic student. Many of the texts in this research address classroom management issues, the ability of the teacher to differentiate the classroom learning environment, and the teacher's understanding of the educational needs of each student.

The shaping influences of the school culture typically focus on the elements of the school experience which affect the student, such as standardized testing, curriculum choices, and the leadership influences of the administration. These studies address the ways in which a culture can motivate, inspire, and engage the heart of the student in the learning process. These shaping influences can be changed by administrator decisions in policy, curriculum content, and physical design of the space within the buildings.

### **Internal Student-Centered Issues**

The research related to apathy typically focused on the ideas of motivation and engagement in the classroom. The primary concern was understanding the psychology of the development of the student through the stages of maturity. Of particular interest was the internal motivations of the student revealed by external behaviors of apathy, disengagement, and misbehavior. Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) sought to develop and conceptionally validate a taxonomy of reasons that give rise to academic amotivation and to investigate the academic consequences. Amotivation can be defined as "a state in which individuals cannot perceive a relationship between their behavior and that behavior's subsequent outcome" (Legault, Green-Demers, & Pelletier, 2006). Amotivated individuals feel detached from their

actions and will invest little to no effort in educational endeavors. The state of amotivation has been compared to learned helplessness, and we can see this connection from the classroom observations of students who struggle to perform. The authors proposed amotivation occurs because of four types of reasons: strategy beliefs, ability beliefs, effort beliefs, and helplessness beliefs. The authors of this research conducted three separate studies to provide this taxonomy of reasons for amotivation. Within the first study, data was collected from 351 high school students who ranged in ages 12-18 years. These students completed questionnaires to understand their perspective toward wanting to study and doing their homework. The findings of the first study revealed and confirmed that academic amotivation is comprised of the four basic reasons corresponding to the four theoretical distinctions outlined by the researchers. The purpose of the second study was similar in that the results of the study confirmed again the four main reasons associated with amotivation. Within the second study, the authors drew from a pool of participants who took part in the large-scale motivation survey. Students who displayed a high level of amotivation were selected and were asked to respond to the question, “how often do you find that you do not want to study or do homework?” The results of this study again confirmed and supported the four basic reasons for amotivation. The third study focused on parents, teachers, and friends who contribute to the various forms of academic amotivation found in studies one and two. The researchers interviewed 741 high school students ranging in age from 12-19 and asked them to fill out a questionnaire about the role of social encouragement in relation to academic motivation. The results show all social support and amotivation variables were significantly correlated, except autonomy support from friends. The culmination of the research is helpful to understand the basic reasons students struggle with amotivation. It is clear students struggle with the belief about their ability to complete an academic task, their belief

about how much effort should be exerted on a given academic task, their belief about the value of the academic task, and their belief about the details of the academic assignment. Although this research provides no clear answers on how to address the issues of student disengagement and apathy, it does provide a clear map of the reasons associated with the internal psychology of a student in relation to their academic work.

In a similar way, the research of Duckworth, Peterson, and Matthews (2007) determined students who struggled in school lacked the “grit” necessary to complete academic tasks. Rather than testing the students on the low end of the motivation spectrum (amotivation), this research determined to study the dynamic in high achievers. They wanted to know what separated the best student from the better students. Within their research, they developed a Grit Scale, which emphasized the measurement of focused effort over time, which would provide a way to predict high performance and accomplishment within the participants. Over the course of their research, the team created six studies to better understand the dynamics of perseverance and passion as it relates to achievement. Within the scope of this current research, studies one, three, and six are the most applicable. The purpose of the first study was to develop and validate a self-report measure of grit in a large sample of adults aged 25 years and older. These participants were invited to participate in an online survey comprised of 27 items that formulated the construct of grit. The results of the first study showed two major implications. First, the more education an adult attained, the higher they scored on the grit scale in comparison to less educated adults of equal age. Second, it was clear that grit grows with age. This is important for the current research on apathy because it shows the impact of the educational process upon the student by which they become more resilient and persistent. It also begs the question of how grit is developed, taught, and fostered in the character of the student through the educational process.

The third study tested whether grit was associated with cumulative GPA among undergraduates at an elite university. Further, using SAT score information as a measure of general mental ability, they measured the correlation of intelligence to grit. Participants were recruited through e-mail invitation, and 139 undergraduate students majoring in psychology completed the survey. As predicted, grit scores were associated with higher GPAs. However, it is interesting to note grit was also associated with lower SAT scores, suggesting among elite undergraduates, smarter students may be slightly less gritty than their peers. “Effort factors into the calculation twice” (Duckworth, 2016). The purpose of the sixth study was a prospective, longitudinal investigation involving the 2005 finalist of the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Of the 273 finalists, 175 elected to participate in the self-reporting questionnaire. The participants ranged from age seven to fifteen years old. Within this study, the team measured the students by the grit scale, a survey of self-control, and a verbal IQ test. The results revealed grit and age were the most reliable predictors of performance and final round participation. On the whole, the study of grit showed individuals with higher levels of education tended to have more grit, grit grows with the age of the individual, and achievement is the product of talent and effort. This research is valuable to the study of apathy, disengagement, and motivation because it provides insight into the high achiever mindset. The goal of further research would be to grow the character development of grit within the student and encourage academic performance for all students, both high and low achievers.

Another similar text by Chamberlin and Matejic (2018) examines the internal decision point at which students give up in their academic endeavors. There are several factors to be considered as students come to the point of amotivation in the classroom. By analyzing this dynamic, the teacher can differentiate the learning environment in order to address the

motivational issues of the student. The book provides several strategies for addressing student apathy and amotivation by encouraging motivation and engagement in the classroom. The author identifies the quit point continuum, which states that a student passes through the phase of engagement, to effort rationing, and eventually sustained quitting. The authors state there are several variables that affect the quit point for a student, which include optimism, task value, resilience, short-term obstacles, and long-term obstacles. The best way to address the quit point continuum is to differentiate the learning process in the classroom and calibrate the climate and culture of the classroom to optimize student engagement. Although this work is not a research study, it does reinforce the ideas from the first two studies cited thus far.

Up to this point, the research describes why a student is apathetic or motivated but does not provide enough insight to form an adequate strategy to foster motivation within the student. There are, however, several studies that emphasize motivational strategies that can enhance the experience of the student in the classroom. The overview article about developmental strategies by Anderman and Midgley challenges the assumption that physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty are the cause of declining motivation as a student moves from elementary school into middle school. The author explores the application of three motivational theories and how they impact the learner. These theories are the attribution theory, which emphasizes the individual student's perception of their educational experience; the goal theory, which emphasizes the reasons students attend school; and the self-determination theory, which emphasizes the individual need for autonomy.

To further explain the concept of the self-determination theory Deci has provided insight for the educational setting when reviewing several studies with his colleagues Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) provide an in-depth explanation of the theory by stating the difference

between self-determined behavior and controlled behavior. “Motivated actions are self-determined to the extent that they are engaged in wholly volitionally and endorsed by one’s sense of self, whereas actions are controlled if they are compelled by some interpersonal or intrapsychic force.” (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). The theory primarily focuses on the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. First, competence involves understanding how to attain outcomes and being effective in performing the action. Second, relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one’s social group. Third, autonomy refers to being self-regulating of one’s own actions. The self-determination theory focuses on how we move our students from extrinsic motivations to intrinsic motivations by internalization. Internalization is the proactive process by which people transform regulation by external rewards and punishments into regulation by an internal process. For the educational setting, the process of internalization is of primary importance because it is the process by which the educator instills values and habits into the life of the student. Thereby, the student becomes responsible for the educational process.

The application of self-determination theory is evident in the research by Bourgeois and Boberg (2016), which applies the self-determination theory by analyzing the relationship between engagement and achievement. Eight high-achieving disengaged middle-school students were interviewed to explore their attitude toward learning. The purpose of the study was two-fold. First, to provide an understanding of motivational factors that define why students are disengaged. Furthermore, second, to understand how the process of disengagement developed. The study was designed as a mixed-method approach that first focused on a 15-item school engagement scale, which consisted of three parts focusing on the behavioral engagement of the student, the emotional engagement of the student, and the cognitive engagement of the student.

The second part of the study focused on a subset of the first phase and qualitatively reviewed eight students in relation to their math performance. In addition, classroom observations, teacher and administrator interviews, and parent surveys were also used in the study to assess the impact of the self-determination theory on the experience of the student. It is clear the study focused on a subset of students that were both academically gifted and cognitively disengaged. This is an important factor in the continuation of research since the driving question continues to focus on how to move a student's motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation through internalization. The results indicated the participants articulated a narrow focus upon grades, which manifested itself through rigorous homework routines and academic competitiveness in preparation for the upcoming college acceptance process and future job opportunities. This indicates our students are motivated by what education provides as benefits and not necessarily for the education itself. Unfortunately, this perspective erodes the development of autonomy and internalization of the value of the educational process and focuses on education as being a means to end.

Another application of the self-determination theory can be found in the work of Wisniewski, White, Green, Elder, Sohel, Perry, and Shapka (2018), in which they propose redefining the student role through relational support as essential if students are to satisfy their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The context of the study was a set of six expressive art courses called Interdisciplinary Expressive Arts (IDEA). These classes were electives open to students of any discipline. The authors chose to utilize the qualitative research approach in which they interviewed five students within the IDEA program. The purpose of the study was to understand how role redefinition of a student emerged as part of a student's experiences of transformation, how the instructors and peers foster the process of role

redefinition, the impact of role redefinition on their education, and how role redefinition affected others in the same context of the IDEA program. The results showed students contribute to role redefinition through their engagement and disengagement in classroom instruction. Teachers tend to respond to engagement by becoming more autonomy supportive and to disengagement by becoming more controlling. It was clear participants who underwent role redefinition did, in fact, change how they engaged their education by showing they took more risks, became more analytical, spoke out in situations of injustice, and became agents of change in their institution.

Related to the ideas of autonomy support and the application of the self-determination theory is the need for relatedness. Relatedness is understood as the social relationships that form in the context of school, primarily seen in their relationships with the teacher but also connected to their relationships with one another. This is clearly seen in the work of Engels, Colpin, Van Leeuwen, Bijttebier, Van Den Noortgate, Claes, Goossens, and Verschueren (2017) in which they aim to extend prior research by using a three-wave longitudinal study to investigate the role of peer status in shaping students school engagement trajectories. By taking a multidimensional perspective on school engagement, as well as on peer status, this study aims to provide differentiated insights in the association between student school engagement and their social environment. Within the study, the researchers instituted three waves of investigation over three years. The first wave surveyed the students when they were in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade, followed by the next year when they were in the eighth, ninth, and tenth grade, and concluded the following year when they were in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade. A total of 1,116 students participated in wave one, 987 students participated in wave two, and 886 students participated in wave three. The student report on engagement versus negative attitudes toward learning questionnaire was used to measure the school engagement of the students. This was



correlated to the classroom-based peer nominations to obtain measures of students' peer likeability and popularity. The results found likeability was a significant and positive predictor of the initial levels of behavioral and emotional engagement but not for behavioral and emotional disaffection, meaning that likeability was strongly related to engagement in the classroom activities. However, popularity was associated with lower levels of behavioral engagement and higher levels of behavioral disaffection. The study also pointed out students become less actively involved in learning activities over time but also do so with less and less enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Not only are peer relationships important to the specifics of the self-determination theory, but also the connection of positive feedback in the process of developing intrinsic motivation. Praise for their ability is commonly considered to have beneficial effects on motivation; however, contrary to this notion, Mueller and Dweck (1998) indicate that praise for intelligence might undermine motivation in the long run if overemphasized in elementary students. These authors demonstrate that praise for intellect has several negative consequences for student achievement motivation rather than praise for effort given on a particular task. The fifth graders studied in this research, who were praised for intelligence, were found to care more about meeting performance standards. However, the children praised for effort cared more about becoming better students. Children praised for intelligence described it as a fixed trait more than children praised for hard work, who believed it to be the subject of improvement.

From the literature thus, it is clear that in regard to the internal student-centered issues, more attention must be placed on the development of intrinsic motivation for students. Most of our school-based curriculum, assessment, and discipline is based on a rewards and punishments behavioral system which fails to reach the intrinsic motivation for the student. Again, Deci

(1999) is helpful in identifying the effects of the reward system on intrinsic motivation with the article written by Koestner and Ryan (1999). The purpose of this study was first to review and critique the research on motivation. A meta-analysis of 128 studies examined the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. As predicted, engagement-contingent, completion-contingent, and performance-contingent rewards significantly undermined free-choice intrinsic motivation. Deci (1999) and his team used a hierarchical approach to conduct two primary meta-analyses. One analysis focused on well-controlled experiments that used free-choice persistence as the dependent measure of intrinsic motivation and the other for well-controlled experiments that used self-reported interest. The primary meta-analysis included 94 published articles and 19 dissertations. One hundred and one studies included free-choice behavior measures of intrinsic motivation, and 84 included a self-report measure for interest or enjoyment. As a result, they found tangible rewards had a significant negative effect on intrinsic motivation for tasks, and this effect showed up with participants ranging from preschool to college. On the other hand, positive feedback had a significant positive effect on intrinsic motivation. The authors determined free-choice behavior is the best indicator for intrinsic motivation, which presents an interesting question for compulsory education. If our schools required students to attend, without the matter of choice, can intrinsic motivation be attained, taught, or fostered? With the backdrop of the internal student-centered issues, we now turn our attention to the research that focuses on the role of the teacher.

### **Teacher Techniques and Strategies**

Although the research process provided several resources focusing on internal student issues, most of the research focused on the techniques and strategies of the teacher. Student apathy could be addressed by the efforts of the teacher to engage the students in a vibrant and

energetic way. A good example of this type of approach to student engagement is from Babbage (1998). He focuses on the teaching process in order to make the classroom interaction more active, vibrant, and innovative so that the experience of the student will be enhanced. The application of high-impact teaching will inspire the motivation of the student through exposure to the passionate teaching of the instructor. The author uses several case studies to apply the methods discussed in his book and provides professional development plans for the reader. There are a plethora of books written with the purpose of educating teachers on how to be better teachers; however, does better teaching lead to full engagement, and does it address the apparent apathy in the classroom?

The research of Scott, Hirn, and Alter (2014) addresses the issue that more and more students with behavioral and academic disabilities are being included in the general education classroom. Teachers report increased issues with students not following directions, being off task, and exhibiting disrupting behaviors. The research showed there was a direct connection between time spent in the task of teaching with the behavioral patterns of students. The research team primarily gathered data through observations in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. These observations measured the duration of teaching, the level of engagement observed, and the pattern of disruption in the classroom. As predicted, the results showed significant correlations between teaching and student engagement. In other words, it means academic achievement and engagement increase with the time engaged in the task of direct teaching. The findings also revealed differences when considered separately for the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Teaching as an observed behavior occurred 59% of the time in the middle and high school classes; however, student engagement remained at 85% of the time observed. It is worth noting that middle and high school classrooms engage in significantly more

independent work, which is appropriate for the grade level of the student; however, there is more opportunity for disruptive behavior as students engage in this independent work. This research reveals the baseline of engagement for students starts with the act of teaching and is necessary for sustained focus in the classroom. Although direct teaching provides higher levels of engagement, it is not clear that direct teaching enables higher levels of motivation.

In addition to time spent on the task of teaching, studies also indicated the teacher to student relationship is primary to ensuring engagement and motivation. Since education is primarily a relational endeavor, students would most likely be more motivated by a teacher who cared for them deeply and showed concern for the well-being of the student. This is clearly seen in the research of Scales, Pekel, Sethi, Chamberlain, and Van Boekel (2019), which states the relationship between the student and the teacher may be the key to motivation and engagement. In a diverse sample of 1,274 middle and high school students from three schools, this mixed-methods study found students who had better relationships with their teacher reported greater motivation and more positive comments about school. Attention to the relationship between the student and teacher clearly had positive effects on the overall performance of the students. As expected, students who reported an increase in the quality of their relationship with their teachers would correlate to a better GPA, academic motivation, engagement, and perceptions of school climate. This research clearly shows when a student has a quality relationship with a teacher, and it makes a difference in their perception about themselves, school, and learning.

The relationship between the student and the teacher has been researched in-depth by Hughes (2011) in her work. The purpose of this study was to progressively investigate the contributions of teacher perceptions and student perceptions of teacher-student relationships. In addition, there was an effort to understand student academic self-views, behavioral engagement,

and achievement levels. The study sought to investigate the effect of elementary students' perceptions through the use of a survey called the Teacher-Student Relationship Quality (TSRQ). The research focused on 714 academically at-risk third graders. Each year data was collected from the teachers through questionnaires and from the students through interviews and their performance on the standard achievement test. Over the course of four years, the researchers were specifically interested in the combined and unique effects of teacher and child perceptions of relational support and conflict. The results showed it might be difficult for teachers to provide support for students who require high levels of teacher correction. Conversely, children's perceptions of relational support are less dependent on their perceptions of relational conflict. That is, children who perceive high levels of conflict in their relationships with teachers also perceive the teacher as emotionally supportive and as liking them as a student. Of interest, the child reports on the TSRQ uniquely predicted changes in the children's perceived academic competencies, sense of belonging, and math achievement. The strongest effects of child reports on the TSRQ were found in the child's self-view as their sense of belonging at school and their academic capabilities. Although the study showed disruptive children who require a lot of correction could wear out a teacher, the benefits of the relationship led to greater motivation and engagement for the disruptive student.

Another bit of research focused on the connectedness of students to their teacher and school was written by Vidourek, King, Bernard, Murnam, and Nabors (2010). The purpose of this research was to address the gaps in the research by examining elementary and middle school teachers' use of specific strategies to positively connect students to their schools. An electronic survey was used for 419 elementary and high school teachers in order to determine what types of strategies were used to ensure engagement in the classroom. The results showed the most

frequently used strategies were being a positive role model for students and calling students by their first names, which encourages a relational classroom. Most teachers who employ connection strategies were elementary teachers and teachers that had received some sort of training in the purpose of connection-building strategies. This research clearly shows teachers who take the initiative to relationally connect to their students have better engagement in the classroom and have more positive attitudes toward their students in general.

Other researchers determined the best way to engage the students would be to provide a learner-centered environment in which students felt empowered to embrace their education. This method was discussed by Winstead (2004) in her research in which the author sought to apply cognitive learning strategies to reading, writing, and mathematics programs within the school setting. Their goal with these strategies was to tap into prior knowledge by focusing on childhood experiences, use advanced graphic organizers so that information can be processed in meaningful chunks and assimilated into existing memory structures, provide students with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimuli to increase memory capacity, and show students how to use mnemonic or key-word methods to learn lists of information or vocabulary which also frees up memory for storing and retrieving other information. With these strategies in mind, the application to the reading program would result in increased automaticity with which a learner reads. This automaticity offers the student time to focus on the meaning, whereas the poor reader who lacks this automaticity has limited capacity to capture the meanings of words and usually ends up not comprehending. When these strategies are applied to the reading program, the cognitive model emphasizes reading and writing as a problem-solving process. This model would emphasize the use of working memory, such as goal setting, organizing, and idea generation. Ideas are consistently being revised through the planning, translation of ideas into

paper, and reviewing in terms of reading and editing, and activation of prior knowledge of the topic and audience. Additionally, math would also move to a problem-based format in which students would be encouraged to view cognitive thinking as a way for students to be more flexible and elaborate as they progress to higher levels of math. In other words, these strategies would help students think more conceptionally and abstractly about the mathematical principles and view it as problem-solving rather than just mimicking the teacher. The application of these strategies would encourage students to be intrinsically motivated by effective teaching methods, teaching activities that promote social interaction, and curricular materials that are within the learner's zone of development.

Finally, the research of Waggett, Johnston, and Jones (2009) was particularly helpful in providing an assessment tool to gauge student's engagement in their work. Within this simple research project, the authors created a quick assessment tool that could be utilized at the end of a lesson or session to rate the level of engagement of the students. The levels of the survey were measured as true engagement, strategic compliance, ritual compliance, retreatism, and rebellion. True engagement states the student sees the activity as personally meaningful and worthwhile; however, strategic compliance is defined as the student understanding the reasons for doing the work are not the true nature of the task; rather grades, rank, acceptance, and approval motivate the completion of the task. Ritual compliance is when the student seeks to avoid confrontation or disapproval and focuses on minimum requirements. Whereas retreatism means a student is disengaged from current goals. Finally, rebellion is when a student is completely disengaged and acting out. Waggett, Johnston, and Jones (2009) applied this structure of questions to 173 participants who attended professional development workshops. Results showed the checklist can be easily employed at the end of a lesson, assignment, or activity and will provide quick and

reliable information for the teacher. This research is valuable to teachers who would like to assess their impact upon the students in their class. This would provide quick feedback for day-to-day adjustments needed in the process of teaching.

In addition to these studies, there are several books that focus on the art of teaching and encourage teachers to create a vibrant, engaging classroom in order to counteract the effects of apathy. A good example of this can be found in the book *Overcoming Student Apathy: Succeeding with All Learners*. Marshall (2014) states there are eight archetypes of apathy. Each chapter contains the personality characteristics of the eight personalities. The focus of the book was an extension of the conversations from the sixteen-week student teaching experience with five student teachers. These student teachers helped create the apathy profiles based on their interactions with students from the classroom. The purpose of this study is to provide insight and reflection for the teacher as they approach characteristics from the profiles of apathy.

Additionally, Horn and Staker (2015) describe the needs of 21st-century learners, which requires an innovative approach to education in order to engage the learner. The authors introduce the idea of disruptive innovation as a means to blend the learning environment of the traditional classroom with needed online learning formats. This approach requires the classroom to adopt new forms of learning in order to address the apathy of students toward the traditional way of teaching. The authors provide several examples from schools utilizing the blended model and provide a way to implement these theories into the classroom.

Along these same lines, Rae (1997) states the solution to the motivational issues of classrooms is found dancing on the "edge of chaos" where the heart of motivation is found. This theory connects the ideas of being serious and fun as the tools of motivation. This combination is referred to as "serious fun" and is defined as "play with a purpose." Serious fun breaks through



the apathy of the cold and boring classroom and provides parameters for the over-excitement of chaos in the classroom. This generates ordered chaos, which allows freedom within structure and fun within limits.

Through the study of this research, it is clear the attitude, commitment, and passion of the teacher have a quantifiable impact upon the engagement of the student. The student-to-teacher relationship remains to be at the center of the teaching process and is the most important aspect of the school culture to consider. Also, it is important to see learner-centered, problem-based education can lead to increases in motivation, engagement, and academic success for the student. Therefore, we now turn our attention to the culture of the school that affects both the teacher and the student.

### **Culturally Driven Issues**

The third branch of research focused on the culture in which the student and teacher interact. These studies primarily sought to create an ideal culture that fosters student motivation. There are three main areas of concentration in the school culture that potentially could shape the experience of the students. These are the effects of standardized testing, the curriculum utilized in the classroom, and the administrative policies that govern the school. To better understand the implication for the cultural calibrations necessary for student motivation, the work of Lazowski and Hulleman (2016) is a good place to start. These authors analyze the most dominant, contemporary theoretical perspectives in student motivation. These theories include achievement emotions, achievement goals, attribution, expectancy-value, goal setting, implicit theories of intelligence, interest, need for achievement, possible selves, self-affirmation, self-confrontation, self-determination, self-efficacy, social belongingness, and transformative experience. This exhaustive list of theoretical frameworks has produced a variety of different

interventions that target student motivation as a catalyst of enhanced learning outcomes. Many of these theories have already been defined by the previous review of literature; however, the treatment of this study focuses the findings for practitioners and educational leaders as useable data for decision making at the policy level. For example, they strongly suggest the use of psychological mechanisms in order to enhance educational outcomes because these interventions cost little to no monetary investment to implement; however, they provide a clear impact upon the engagement of the student. Basically, Lazowski and Hulleman (2016) are indicating the use of these theories can be woven into the fabric of the school through the relational efforts of faculty, staff, and administration as the formation of culture. Deal and Peterson (2016) stated, “curriculum standardization, increased testing, and research-based models have often replaced local discretion, faith, creativity, and teacher ingenuity. The unintended result of these reforms is the unraveling of symbolic fibers that once gave a hallowed enterprise passion, purpose, and meaning. What were once joyful places of promise and hope have too often become semi-mechanized factories bent on producing only a small fraction of what a well-educated person needs and, deep down, what a community or the country really wants or needs” (Deal & Peterson, 2016). The development of culture through simple, relational efforts from well-meaning adults, who are passionate about teaching, can create an environment in which students are deeply engaged in the educational process.

### *Standardized Testing*

Educational leaders can shape school culture through data collection. Data is often found through the testing process for the students, and this dynamic can be seen within the desire to test students in order to determine academic competence and create positive changes in the curriculum or student experience. Although our schools have ramped up the testing procedures,

the effect of that process must be reviewed, critiqued, and potentially corrected. Raffini (1993) states the norm-referenced testing process of school culture is detrimental for the struggling student. Students are motivated at higher levels if schools begin to evaluate by identifiable standards of excellence. This criteria-based testing would be a better reference point for determining academic success and struggling students who would be motivated to increase their efforts and less likely to be apathetic. Raffini (1986) goes on to state in another publication the perception of the student based on the norm-referenced testing causes the student to lose motivation. Since the norm-referenced testing automatically places 50% of the students below average in comparison to the rest of the norm-referenced group, students are discouraged in their academic abilities. Instead, the author suggests criteria-driven testing will provide a clear articulation of the student's ability and understanding of the subject matter. He lays out the strategies that can rekindle student effort as being individual goal setting, outcome-based instruction and evaluation, attribution retraining, and cooperative learning. Ultimately, the author connects the student's performance to their understanding of self-worth. Finally, Raffini (1988) states the factors having made it difficult for many students to meet their psychological and academic needs within traditional classrooms. The book provides teachers with several suggestions for classroom adjustments and motivational strategies designed to help meet the needs of students and thereby increase student motivation to learn. This research connects well with the study on the development of grit. Often norm-referenced testing focuses on the natural intellectual ability of the student; however, with the development of grit in the character of the student, it is important to understand the other capacities of the character of the student.

### *Curriculum*

In contrast to the standardized testing results, other researchers have focused on the need to enhance or change the content and mode of the curriculum. For one such researcher, the economy of attention must be reviewed altogether. De Castell and Jensen (2004) state the culture of education should mimic the popular gaming culture that has captured the hearts of our youth today. Currently, men and boys are the primary users of computer-based gaming. As has been repeatedly observed, boys' early and continued involvement with gaming has been a key factor contributing to their greater interest in, as well as their greater competence and confidence with, new technologies. A key to the gaming success has been its engagement with and its ability to map absorbing and pleasurable activity onto the new structures and functions of attention youthful consumers are being taught to use in attending to and interacting with information and experience in multi-mediated virtual environments. The author would propose rather than focusing on how to gain and maintain attention, the goal would be to facilitate or enable attention to data by developing new attention structures such as a gaming format to process the educational information. This can be done through the development of the video game as the mode or conduit of education. Within the environment of the video game, the mobilization of players' attention and intelligence through interactive gameplay can encompass an acquisition of motor and perceptual skills, the ability to complete increasingly complex interlinked tasks, the learning and systematic pursuit of game-based narrative structures, the internalization and enactment of appropriate affect, and range of other attendant forms and conditions of learning. In so doing, the goal of education would be to wed the pleasure of playing with the work of education and thus attract consistent engagement with the student.

Additionally, Tofel-Grehl, Fields, Searle, Maahs-Fladung, Feldon, Gu, and Sun (2017) sought to measure the effect of providing electronic textiles (in this case, sewable circuits) in an

eighth grade science class with the purpose of exploring possible gains in student learning and motivation. The research team provided one group of students the e-textiles while comparing their experience with the traditional way of teaching the same concepts. Although the results revealed that the learning of the concepts was consistent in both classes, the e-textile group reported a stronger learning experience and greater connection to their family. Since the class became more project based, potentially the interactions with parents increased, and excitement about education was supported. This is important because it connects the social bonds and values to support education at school and home.

The cultural issues addressed in the research are also found in the type of curriculum utilized for the school. The content of the education can have a great effect on the engagement and readiness of the students. This is clearly articulated by Wexler (2019) as she explores the reasons that students seem to be falling behind in their basic grasp of elementary concepts. She states that the reason a knowledge gap exists is because of the intense focus on decontextualized reading comprehension skills rather than on factual knowledge. The author has researched several schools in various socio-economic settings and sizes. She has drawn these conclusions by examining the core curriculum and the means by which it is administered.

### *School Leadership*

The third area of cultural influence identified is the ability of the school leadership to create administrative policies that would shape the experience of the student. Renchler (1992) states the school culture is the key to motivating students. School leaders can foster student motivation by formulating an atmosphere of academic success through cultivating an environment motivated to learn. Leaders can shape a school culture that encourages learning by constructing the classroom climate and providing activities to communicate goals. By

restructuring the school culture, the school leader can create a positive psychological environment that encourages student motivation. School leaders should establish programs that stress goal setting, self-regulation, student choice, reward, teamwork, and teach time management skills.

The final example of cultural issues would be the academic rigor of the environment. If the academic environment is too rigorous, students will be exasperated and defeated; however, if the academic environment is too easy, then students will not be academically challenged. The goal of the educational leader is to calibrate the academic temperature in order to foster the best environment for learning. Lee (2012) researched this dynamic in which he determined relationships between student's perceptions of the school social environment and student outcomes. The research surveyed 3,748 fifteen-year-old students from 147 schools. The goal of the research was to mimic the authoritative parental style defined as high demandingness and high responsiveness in the classroom with teachers and to test the academic engagement and performance of the students. The results showed that the supportive teacher-to-student relationship in relation to the academic expectations was significantly related to behavioral and emotional student engagement.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps the most integrated research on motivation and engagement was clear in the work of Martin (2013), Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney. Within his work, he states, "external influences play an important role in the development of will and skill. Major external influences include parents, peers, counsellors, and teachers. Of these, much research suggests it is the teacher (via instruction) who perhaps plays the greatest role in directly impacting both academic will and academic skill (Martin, 2013)." He goes on to defines

academic will as the internal drive or attitude of the student in relation to the educational experience and also define academic skill as the competencies of education such as completing assignments and following academic tasks. Through his research, he is able to chart the motivational strategies of students and determine engagement patterns based on those motivations. Within the motivation and engagement scale, Martin (2013) tracks eleven different motivation and engagement patterns and charts them on a graph to provide a clear motivation and engagement profile. His self-reporting survey tool can be used with middle school and high school students. For the purpose of this current research project, the Motivation and Engagement Survey (MES) will be utilized to establish a motivation profile for each student at the school.

Given the expanse of the research available on these areas of concentration, the continuation of this research will need to focus an answer on the overlapping interactions of the major branches of research. The current body of research seems isolated to the categories and assumes the answer to the issue of student apathy to have a singular focus. However, a comprehensive approach needs to be considered to address the multi-faceted and complex issue of student engagement facing our students today.

A comprehensive approach would assess the overlapping spheres of influence upon the student and provide further research on the correlations between these spheres. In other words, the next logical step in the research process will be to synthesize the branches of current research into a comprehensive program that would address students, teachers, and school culture. Good teaching from solid teachers who care for the students in the context of a focused and clear school culture equals an engaged community.

In addition to the need to provide a comprehensive approach to the subject, the research does not examine the family attitudes or influence upon motivation within a school. It is

important to assess the value system within the home, which is the basic starting point for the student. Since the authority of the teacher is an extension of the home, the alignment of the school philosophy with family expectations will be an important factor to measure and calibrate. A correlation study should be created to assess the value system of the family in relation to the values presented by the educational institution. The assumption would be that alignment of these values would increase student engagement simply because of the consistent communication of values between home and school.

The next logical step would be to continue the research based on intrinsic motivation. The goal of the next stage of research would be to take all the information we currently understand about the student, teacher, and cultural setting and apply this to an effort to increase the love of learning within the heart of the student. This can be done by providing master teachers who provide a clear love for their students and are able to connect with them in the teaching process. Rather than simply providing external motivations, whether they be positive or negative, the student must be challenged to engage their education internally and to value the process of being educated.



## CHAPTER III:

### METHODS

The purpose of this study is to clearly understand and encourage the motivation (attitude) and engagement (behaviors) of middle school students in the classroom. The driving question for the study remains, how can Regents School of Oxford improve the motivation (attitudes) and engagement (behaviors) of middle school students so that these students are retained through middle school until graduation? Within this central question, the research will address what factors encourage student motivation and engagement in the classroom? Will types of classroom teaching practices and activities improve motivation and engagement for middle school students? Did students report that classroom technology improved motivation and engagement in the classroom? Did students report that the Socratic Teaching method improved motivation and engagement in the classroom? Do supportive relationships with teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom? Did students report that reshaping the grading policies and procedures improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom? Did teachers report that reshaping the teacher observation protocol to focus on student engagement improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Within this chapter, the applied research design and methods are presented to improve student motivation and engagement in the classroom of Regents School of Oxford. Chapter three is divided into three main parts. First, the development of the action plan is described. Second, the full description of the action plan is presented. And third, the program evaluation of the action plan provides recommendations for the improvement of the Regents school culture.

The main driver of the action plan will address the apparent apathy of middle school students in the classroom and will seek to improve the motivation of a student to learn, encourages a student to be engaged in classroom activities, and equip a teacher to address motivation and engagement in their classroom. These skills are vital to enable teachers to encourage and increase the engagement of students in the classroom as well as complete the stated mission of the school, which seeks to instill the love of learning into each child.

### **Development of the Action Plan**

In the spring of 2019, the administration of the school reviewed the performance data annually assessed for the accreditation process which included the Stanford Achievement Test data for the first through eighth grade, the Student Satisfaction Survey results, and the Parent Satisfaction Survey results. Based on this information, a collaborative discussion between the Preschool Director, Lower School Principal, Upper School Principal, Director of Educational Services, and the Head of School provided feedback about the classroom dynamics evident in the school culture of the middle school. A key area of discussion was the apparent loss of excitement about the educational process once a student moved from fifth to sixth grade. Additionally, the attrition patterns over the past five years revealed a higher rate of students transferring to other schools from the fifth to sixth grade as well. Based on this information, the administration of the school was tasked to design and implementation a program addressing the key factors related to the motivation and engagement of middle school students, essentially addressing the question of why students leave the school and what would encourage these students to remain at the school. During the weekly administration meetings, the principals of each section of the school (early education, lower school, and upper school) were engaged in the discussions about how to best implement the program to encourage motivation and engagement.

These conversations have been a solid training ground for defining student motivation as a strategic goal for our students and also have led to many discussions about how student engagement should look within the classroom.

In the fall of 2019, the Head of School began the process of reviewing research related to motivation and engagement strategies. Based on the research of Martin (2013), the Motivation and Engagement Survey (MES) tool will be used to assess students so that a motivation and engagement baseline can be established. As the program progresses, the goal will be to monitor the progression in students as they adopt positive engagement behaviors and exhibit positive motivational attitudes and engagement behaviors of the students through the classroom observation process. The research revealed several areas that could be enhanced within the school culture to address the problem of student attrition and the apparent apathy of middle school students.

First, the goal of the proposed program is to increase the awareness of students' struggles as they move through the middle school years. This can be done effectively through the teacher training process at the beginning of each year. Based on the research of Duckworth, Peterson, and Matthews (2007), student motivation can be measured and understood by measuring the student's ability to persevere through required tasks. Additionally, the research of Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) provides clear reasons that students struggle with apathy and disengagement. With this research in mind, the administration will plan to have teacher training that focuses on educating the faculty on the reasons that struggle and ways in which we can build perseverance into their character throughout the elementary years to ensure a quality transition into middle school. In addition to the teacher training, the administration discussed informal mentoring to check on students throughout the year. Research clearly shows that connectedness

to the teacher is a key driver in the motivation and engagement process. Finally, in order to address student emotional needs beyond the ability of the teacher and staff, the administration suggested hiring a Guidance Counselor to address the needs of student well-being.

Second, the research clearly highlighted the need to provide quality teaching strategies and techniques to engage students better in the classroom. Again, this points to the need of the school to provide quality teacher training, but additionally, it was necessary to provide some changes in the design of the teacher observation process. Since the observation process had primarily been focused on the direct teaching of the teacher, little consideration had been given to the response of the student. With the adoption of the ELEOT observation system, the teachers can be trained to better engage the students relationally in the classroom, which was a key indicator of student success in the research review. Additionally, the teachers would need to be trained to change the style of their teaching interactions in the middle school classroom to encourage dialogue, discussion, and thought. Therefore, the Socratic Teaching Method would be reviewed in the teacher training process and then observed through the ELEOT protocols for teacher assessment. Finally, the research showed that the inclusion of technology in the classroom would encourage student engagement. Again, teacher training and assessment expectations would need to be adjusted in order to ensure that quality motivation and engagement is occurring in the classroom.

Third, the research also addressed the need for policy changes that erode the motivation of students in the classroom. According to the research, school culture dictates the response of students, and the shaping of the culture through policies and procedures will potentially enhance the motivation and engagement of students, especially as they are moving from the fifth to sixth grade level. As the administration developed the plan to address these issues, a full review of the

current policies in our middle school is necessary to ensure we are encouraging student engagement at all levels.

Overall, the development of the program seeks to provide two components within the experience of the student to encourage motivation which is relational support and academic challenge. Only when a class is truly working toward a challenging experience will a student acknowledge the clear purpose of education, but they will also need the support of the teacher as they experience this rigor of the educational process. The action plan was developed through understanding the most recent research and applying this research to the needs of the students.

### **Description of the Action Plan**

In order to begin the process of understanding the motivational issues that students face in the classroom, the program will seek to connect students with adults on campus in meaningful ways through a mentoring program and hiring a guidance counselor to ensure that the school provides holistic care for the students at the school (See Appendix A). These resources are vital to the experience of the student in order to provide a supportive environment within a rigorous academic climate. When support and challenge are appropriately provided for the students, then the students are able to reach their full potential. Through the provision of these valuable relationships, the motivation and engagement of the students should increase over time. In the fall of 2020, Regents School of Oxford will organize an informal mentoring program in which a select set of faculty members will be assigned a group of students to follow up with throughout the year. It will be their responsibility to check in with this student, eat lunch with them once a month, observe their academic progress, and generally determine their academic motivation and engagement. This informal information will be communicated back to the principals and directors of the school. The goal of this element is to provide a clear connection with an adult on

campus so that they as students feel supported in and out of the classroom. As students struggle with motivation and engagement, the mentoring adult will be able to encourage and support the student as they move through their classes on a daily basis. The information gathered from this element will help to understand the experience of the student as they build a meaningful relationship with a mentor on campus. Additionally, in the fall of 2021, Regents School of Oxford will begin the process of providing a Guidance Counselor for students. The goal of this element is to provide a resource for students that have counseling needs or issues. In addition, this counselor would guide the administration in making good decisions about a student's emotional well-being. When a student needs additional assistance beyond what the mentor can provide, the counselor will provide the extra support needed for the student to be successful. The information provided by this element will identify how many students are in need of higher levels of counseling beyond what a mentor can provide on a day-to-day basis and examine the typical student issues in need of regular counseling.

In order to fully understand the motivational experience of the student, the program participants will be required to fill out the Motivation and Engagement Survey (MES) for fifth through eighth grade students. A motivational profile will be created in order to help the student better understand how they are interacting in the classroom environment. Once the MES profile is created, the information will be shared with the counselor and mentor, as well as the teachers, so that they will better understand how the students interact in the classroom. This information is helpful to see if the application of the program enables students to apply positive strategies to motivation and engagement in the classroom. The information collected through the MES will place the student on the motivation and engagement wheel, which measures the positive motivational attitudes, such as self-belief, learning focus, and valuing school, as well as the

positive engagement behaviors, such as persistence, planning, and task management. In addition, the survey will also measure negative motivational attitudes, such as anxiety, failure avoidance, and uncertain control, as well as negative engagement behaviors, such as disengagement and self-sabotage. By creating a MES profile, each student can better understand how they handle the stress and pressure of school. The goal will be to determine how we encourage students toward positive and healthy forms of motivation and engagement while discouraging negative attitudes and behaviors through providing supportive relationships with mentors and counselors on campus. This information will be gathered before and after the implementation of the program in order to better understand if students' attitudes and perceptions have changed over the course of the mentoring efforts and the provision of a counselor on campus. Once the data is gathered, it will be shared with the School Board, faculty, staff, and students. The purpose of this motivational profile is to fully understand the issues students believe affect their motivation and engagement in the classroom and communicate those issues and concerns to the teachers. This element will focus first on a survey of the students to create a baseline understanding of their current motivation and engagement levels in the classroom, followed by providing teacher training and mentoring opportunities for the students in order to potentially increase motivation and engagement in the classroom.

In the fall of 2021, Regents School of Oxford will have a week-long teacher training seminar to better understand the dynamics of student motivation and engagement. We will provide two books to read prior to the training, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* by Duckworth (2016) and *Quit Point: Understanding Apathy, Engagement, and Motivation in the Classroom* by Chamberlin and Matijic (2018). In addition to these books, they will be required to read the article *From Will to Skill: The Psychology of Motivation, Instruction, and Learning*

by Martin (2013). The goal of this training is to provide an understanding of motivational issues that students face on a day-to-day basis. Often teachers believe that students simply struggle because they have a bad attitude; however, the motivational issues are often more complex. The training will not only describe the current issues that students face but also provide some needed strategies and techniques that teachers can utilize in the classroom to encourage motivation and engagement. The purpose of the element is to fully understand the classroom environment in regard to motivation and engagement. Teachers will be given the opportunity to learn more about what motivates and engages students, as well as, talking through potential strategies such as Socratic teaching methods that would increase and encourage motivation and engagement in the classroom. After this initial training process and throughout the conversations of collaboration, teachers will be given the opportunity to watch each other teach on a regular basis. This peer observation process is essential in developing a needed dialogue about how to create a vibrant, engaging classroom that fully supports students in a rigorous curriculum and reinforces the concepts covered in the training program. As the process of learning these strategies takes place, the administration will observe these classes in order to specifically see the engagement of students take place in the classroom by using the ELEOT observation tool. The administration will provide needed feedback to the teacher so that they can increase the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom. In the fall of 2020, Regents School of Oxford will adjust the parameters of the observation process to focus on student engagement rather than on teacher performance. The guidance of the ELEOT observation tool will help define these protocols to ensure that consistent standards are applied to all teachers at all levels. Within this process, the administration will provide peer observation opportunities and a guided discussion about the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom. The purpose of these



observations is to understand how the teaching strategies and techniques used by the teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students. By helping teachers create a vibrant, engaging, and supportive environment of learning, we are able to foster a learning environment in which students can reach their full potential. Often teachers need the collaboration and support of other teachers as they work to hone their educational skills. Through creating professional learning communities that seek to meet the common vision of the school, as stated in the mission, teachers will feel safe and supported in their endeavor to provide quality education for the students. The type of community is built on providing a safe, trusting environment that encourages collaboration between professional teachers. The observation information will be triangulated with the MES survey information and the focus groups with teachers. By cross-referencing this information, the correlating themes will provide clarity on how to motivate and engage students for the purpose of enhancing their learning experience. The collaboration through peer observations will allow teachers to institute needed changes in the classrooms, and their teaching will be enhanced through this learning process as a community of support as well as challenge.

As the teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate and observe one another teach, we will also encourage engaging styles of pedagogy that require student engagement. In the fall of 2020, Regents School of Oxford will encourage the use of Socratic teaching in all fifth through twelfth grade classes to increase student engagement in the process of teaching. The goal of this encouragement will be to utilize the interactive teaching method of Socratic teaching to increase student involvement by requiring the student to dialogue and debate topics within the course of study. In the Fall of 2019, the teacher training focused on Socratic teaching and were provided clear examples of how to integrate this teaching strategy into the classroom. This

method will encourage students to share their ideas, ask questions, and move beyond simply regurgitating informational content. Through instituting a different style of teaching, we will be able to measure the engagement of students by noticing the changes in the MES profile and through the ELEOT observations by the administration.

In addition to these teaching strategies, Regents School of Oxford will also install new tools of technology into the classroom to enhance the engagement of the students with the lesson being taught. Each room will have a SmartBoard interface, projector, computer, and each student in grades sixth through twelfth will have a school-issued Chromebook. As this technology is implemented in the classroom, we will provide professional development opportunities for the teachers to learn how to effectively use the new technologies to enhance the classroom. This implementation of technology will allow us to assess if students' motivation and engagement increase by using these tools in the educational process. Students will be asked what technologies best guide, aid, and encourage engagement in the classroom setting. The goal of this element will be to design a classroom that maximizes the tools of learning to increase student engagement.

The final element focuses on the policies of the school and seeks to identify if there are aspects of the school policies and procedures that discourage motivation and engagement in the classroom. The process will begin with the administration working through the current policies of the school handbook and seeking to make any needed changes that might discourage or encourage engagement. Once the administration has clearly determined changes, the Head of School will present the proposed changes to the faculty for revision, feedback, and needed input. This process will allow the faculty to collaborate with the administration to ensure that the policies are beneficial for the classroom and student engagement. Additionally, student focus

groups will be formulated to better understand their perspective on the policies of the school. This collaboration between administration, faculty, and students will provide the needed inputs to clearly understand the changes necessary for the existing school policies. Finally, the proposed changes will be presented to the School Board for final approval within the school handbook. Since the School Board has the rightful authority to make policy change, it will be important to include them in all the conversations along the way in the process of review. Therefore, a member of the Board will be included in the review by the administration, the collaboration with the faculty, and will be given the results of the focus groups with the students to ensure they are well-informed as they make final decisions about policy changes at the school. The purpose of including this element in the program is to fully understand how policies and procedures of the school either encourage or discourage engagement. There are several ways in which the normal operations of the school could be changed to encourage student motivation. For example, in our upper school, Regents School of Oxford will hold parent-teacher conferences before the report cards are completed. By simply changing the date of the parent-teacher conferences and including the student in the conversation about the report card, motivation and engagement would be encouraged. There are several ways in which our normal operations could be modified to include students, foster conversations between parents, students, and teachers, which would greatly benefit the student. Given the reality that teachers enforce the policy in the classroom, it is necessary to ensure that the teachers can utilize the policies to encourage and foster engagement. Their feedback and buy-in to the process of policy change will be vital to the outcome and implementation of the program. The goal of this element is to understand the point of view of the students in regard to the policy and procedures of the school. In many ways, the students experience the policy and are the best group to think through the

cumulative effect these policies have on their experience. This information from the students should be cross-referenced with the feedback of the teachers and the perspective of the administration. Through this collaboration of administration, faculty, and students, a clear picture of adjustment of policy can occur for the normal operations of the school.

In the Spring of 2020, the nation faced an unprecedented pandemic which caused many schools in America to shut down for the last quarter of school. Regents also moved the educational offerings to an online format with the use of Google Classroom and a learning management system through the FACTS system. The pandemic has affected the implementation of the motivation and engagement program at the school mainly through the timing of when and how professional development was offered to the teachers. Other areas of the program were delayed but were easily implemented the Fall of 2020 once school resumed in person. Regents was fortunate throughout the 2020-2021 school year because the school never had to shut down or move to hybrid education due to COVID case numbers.

### **Program Evaluation Plan**

The evaluation plan is comprised of five main evaluation indicators to measure if the motivation and engagement of students improved throughout the program. Three of these components are quantitative in nature, and two of them are qualitative. The quantitative components are the Motivation and Engagement Scale (MES) survey, the Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT), and the annual attrition data for the middle school grades. The purpose of the quantitative components is to assess if the motivation and engagement of students improved through the course of the program. Essentially, these evaluation components are designed to answer the formative research questions focused on the factors that contribute to improved motivation and engagement in the classroom, such as supportive relationships, changes in school

policies and procedures, and the types of classroom activities that result in improved engagement. Additionally, the two qualitative components are the student focus groups with middle school students and faculty focus groups with the teachers who implemented the program. These qualitative components answer the summative research questions focused on the perceptions of the students and teachers in relation to their motivation and engagement in the classroom.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Program Elements*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Evaluation Tool</b>
Central Question:	
1. How can the school improve the motivation and engagement of middle school students in the classroom?	MES
	SAT Results
	Retention Data
Element One:	
1. What factors encourage student motivation and engagement in the classroom?	Student Focus Group
	Faculty Focus Group
2. Will types of classroom teaching practices and activities improve motivation and engagement for middle school students?	
3. Did students report that classroom technology improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?	

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4. Did students report that the Socratic Teaching method improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Element Two:

Student Focus Group

1. Do supportive relationships with teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom?
2. Did students report a mentoring program with teachers improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
3. Did students report that a guidance counselor improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Faculty Focus Group

Element Three:

Student Focus Group

1. Does the adjustment of school policies and procedures affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom?
2. Did students report reshaping the grading policies and procedures improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
3. Did teachers report that reshaping the teacher observation protocol to focus on student engagement improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Faculty Focus Group

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Once the program has been completed, the evaluation of the students will begin with the administration of the MES profile to assess if the students have improved in the areas of positive motivation and engagement. Since the MES survey was administered before the program began,

we will be able to see if any students adopted positive strategies of motivation and engagement through the implementation of the program as we compare the pre-and post-measurements of the survey. The goal of this evaluation is to determine what factors contribute to motivation in the classroom and more enjoyment from the learning process by comparing the answers found in the student and teacher focus groups with the MES information gathered through the process. This evaluation will provide clarity around what behaviors changed for the students and why the student decided to make these types of changes in their educational choices and attitude.

The other quantitative measurement will be the attrition numbers from fifth to sixth grade, which has traditionally been low for the school. An increase in the retention rate during this crucial transition will be a clear indicator that students desire the type of education provided in the middle school experience at Regents. This information will again address the main research question, answering what factors contribute to increased motivation and engagement. The logic is that if students are engaged and motivated, they will want to stay at the school throughout the experience and eventually graduate from the institution.

Student focus groups will be held to determine if the mentoring program, changes in teaching strategies, and additional technology were helpful to their overall experience in the classroom. This assessment is crucial in understanding what motivates students to be engaged in the classroom. The goal will be to compare the themes and trends found in the student focus group information with the focus group gathered from the teachers to better understand what motivates a student and how teachers can better engage a student in the classroom. Within these focus group conversations, students will be asked to provide feedback on the major elements of the study, such as the mentoring program, teaching strategies in the classroom, enhanced technology use by teachers, and their experience of taking the MES profile. Also, they will be

asked if they have utilized the services of the guidance counselor and if these experiences were helpful to their overall experience in the classroom. Within the focus group conversation, the students will be asked about the policy changes at the school and if these changes had an effect on their attitude in the classroom. The information gathered from this assessment will be reviewed in light of the MES survey information to determine what factors contribute to motivation and engagement.

Additionally, faculty focus groups will be held to determine if the professional development and classroom teaching strategies were helpful to the motivation and engagement of the students in the classroom. They will be asked to reflect on the technology provided in the classroom, as well as the Socratic teaching method's impact upon the students. Finally, the teachers will be asked about the peer observation process and the collaboration conversations about motivation and engagement. This information will be important to clearly understand in order to enhance the experience of the teacher. Since the role of the teacher has the highest impact on the development of the student, it will be essential to determine what factors contributed to creating a vibrant classroom with a supportive and loving teacher. The combination of a self-reporting survey (MES), student focus groups, and faculty focus groups, clear themes should provide recognized changes to the school culture that support the improvement of motivation and engagement for middle school students.

Finally, the SAT scores will be reviewed to see if there was an overall increase in student performance over the past year. In particular, we will review the lower-scoring students to see if an increase can be identified through the efforts of the program and see their experience of school was more positive overall. Additionally, the SAT information will be cross-referenced with the MES profile to determine if there are correlations in scoring with motivation and



engagement strategies by the student. This information will be important to better understand the connection between effort and intellect as we seek to instill passion, perseverance, and persistence into the character of our students.

## **Conclusion**

The current body of research has isolated the study of motivation and engagement to the categories of internal student issues, teaching strategies, and the shaping of school culture and assumes the answer to the issue of student apathy to have a singular focus. However, a comprehensive approach, as seen in this proposed program addresses the multi-faceted and complex issue of student engagement facing the students of Regents. The program promotes vibrant teaching from solid teachers who care for the students in the context of a focused and clear school culture which will create an engaged community.

## CHAPTER IV:

### FINDINGS

The motivation and engagement program evaluation process at Regents revealed several important findings for educational leaders to understand. This chapter explains the evaluation data and uses the data to answer each research question. The results focus on the students' experience in the classroom to better understand what factors contribute to motivation and engagement. Second, the results focus on supportive relationships around the student during the educational experience. And third, the results focus on the educational policies shaping the school's culture to determine their effect on motivation and engagement. These findings provide clear directives for continuous improvement in school culture and are essential for a rigorous and supportive academic environment.

#### **Purpose Statement**

This study aimed to clearly understand how to improve and encourage the motivation (attitude) and engagement (behaviors) of students at Regents. The study provided direction for educational leaders to engage and motivate students by enhancing the school's academic culture. In order to better understand the dynamics of student engagement and motivation, an applied research design has been used to identify key factors contributing to motivation and engagement, then create a program to address student apathy in the classroom. In evaluating this student engagement program, student focus groups with middle school students who participated in the Motivation and Engagement Survey Profile (Martin, 2013) provided understanding of the dynamics leading to student apathy and disengagement. In addition, these focus groups clarified

why students have lost motivational excitement about school and begin to show behavioral disengagement from class.

Throughout the implementation of the program, the work of Martin (2013) was used to better understand the dynamics of engagement and motivation at Regents. Primarily, Martin's Motivation and Engagement Survey was used during teacher training sessions and administrative meetings to provide a common language of the concepts. Additionally, the work of Duckworth (2016) was used to define the idea of grit which is a combination of passion and perseverance over a period of time. This language was used to identify the dynamics of motivation and engagement. The goal of the research project was to build passion and perseverance as character traits in our students. Finally, Raffini's (1993) work was helpful in shaping school policies to encourage student engagement. As the school leadership moves toward continuous improvement, the re-working of policies and procedures has been a critical factor in encouraging the motivation and engagement of the students.

### **Research Questions**

Several research questions were used to direct and focus the work of the program. The driving question of the study sought to understand what factors contribute to the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom.

Element One: Formative

- a) What factors encourage student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Will classroom teaching practices and activities improve motivation and engagement for middle school students?

Element One: Summative

- a) Did students report classroom technology improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Did students report the Socratic Teaching method improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Element Two: Formative

- a) Do supportive relationships with teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom?

Element Two: Summative

- a) Did students report a mentoring program with teachers that improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?
- b) Did students report a guidance counselor improved student motivation and engagement in the classroom?

Element Three: Formative

- a) Does the adjustment of school policies and procedures affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom?

Element Three: Summative

- a) Did students report reshaping the grading policies and procedures improved student motivation and classroom engagement?
- b) Did teachers report reshaping the teacher observation protocol to focus on student engagement improved motivation and engagement in the classroom?

**Applied Research Design**

An applied research program was used to identify the problem of practice in the educational setting and presented a data-informed solution to the stated problem for continuous

improvement within the institution. The problem identified in the culture of Regents School of Oxford focused on the motivation and engagement of students as they developed through the middle school years. Two dynamics were evident in a student's life within the classroom; motivation, which is the internal attitudes of the student, and engagement, which is the behaviors flowing from the student's motivational attitudes. Highly motivated fifth graders tended to lose their motivation and subsequently their engagement in the classroom throughout the process of middle school. There are several reasons for this dynamic in the classroom. An action plan was provided to improve and encourage both the student's motivation to learn and the behaviors of student engagement in learning.

After implementing the applied research program, the evaluation process collected and assessed the motivation and engagement perceptions of students and teachers through the Motivation and Engagement Survey Profile (MES), student focus groups, teacher focus groups, ELEOT observation information, and SAT data. The MES was administered to provide a snapshot of the students' current motivational attitudes and engagement perspectives. In addition, this evaluation process addressed primary questions about how to continue the improvement of student motivation so students can thrive in an educational environment.

### **Motivation and Engagement Survey Results**

In reviewing the data for the program evaluation, it is essential to clearly understand the positive and negative aspects of the motivation and engagement survey used in the research. The MES defined six positive traits for motivation and engagement. Learning focus, valuing, and self-belief define the student's positive motivations (internal attitudes), and planning, task management, and persistence define the student's positive engagement (external behaviors). The data gathered represents the scores of 27 students from the fifth through seventh grade.

Although there are 90 students in the fifth through eighth grade classes, only 27 students chose to participate, representing 30% of the middle school students. Table 2 below provides specific participation rates for each class level.

**Table 2**  
*Class Participation*

	Enrolled	Participants	Percentage
Fifth Grade	30	13	43%
Sixth Grade	27	8	30%
Seventh Grade	22	6	27%
Eighth Grade	11	0	0%
Total	90	27	30%

In Table 3, basic descriptive statistics are provided to give an overview of the scores reported by the students. In general, the students are reporting high levels of self-belief and valuing, which indicates the students have a robust and positive attitude toward school in general. The mean score for valuing was 85, and the score for self-belief was 84.07. These scores reflect the students' value of education and belief they can complete the learning activities. Additionally, the students report lower scores in general in engagement behaviors. Although students are motivated to learn, their reported behaviors in the classroom are, on average lower. Specifically, planning, with a score of 69.07, was the lowest category scored by the students followed closely by task management (72.04). Although these scores are lower overall, the engagement scores reflect quality engagement behavior in the classroom, which is also observed

by the leadership team and reflected in the observation data gathered by the ELEOT teacher observation tool.

**Table 3**

*Positive Category Averages*

	Mean	Mode	Std. Dev.	Range
Learning Focus	83.52	100.00	13.14	40.00
Valuing	85.00	80.00	10.65	35.00
Self-Belief	84.07	90.00	14.08	60.00
Planning	69.07	60.00	19.71	80.00
Task Management	72.04	80.00	19.87	75.00
Persistence	79.07	85.00	16.17	75.00

In Table 4, the students report negative traits of motivation and engagement, and in this case, there is an inverse relationship. In general, the lowest overall score reported by the students was self-sabotage, with a score of 26.11, which is encouraging because this means students are not purposefully sabotaging their educational efforts. The highest score in this area is anxiety, which scored 58.52 on average. Although anxiety is listed as a negative trait, anxiety should be analyzed and clearly understood before denouncing it as an educational impediment. Often anxiety is the emotion that fuels the educational endeavor, and the study has revealed there is a fine line between conscientiousness and unhealthy anxiety in the classroom.

Additionally, the overall score for disengagement was 30.93, indicating students are highly engaged in learning classroom activities. The most exciting aspect in scoring negative motivation and engagement traits is the standard deviation score for failure avoidance at 21.59

and a range score of 80, indicating the students provided an extensive range of scores on the survey questions. The standard deviation points to the dynamic wherein some students actively avoid learning activities to cope with potential failure.

**Table 4**

*Negative Category Averages*

	Mean	Mode	Std. Dev.	Range
Disengagement	30.93	20.00	13.16	40.00
Self-Sabotage	26.11	20.00	10.32	35.00
Anxiety	58.52	55.00	17.25	75.00
Failure Avoidance	40.19	25.00	21.59	80.00
Uncertain Control	38.52	25.00	16.69	65.00

The motivation and engagement survey data provides an evaluation baseline used to compare other data points gathered for a better understanding of the dynamics of student behavior in the classroom. In order to answer the research questions, a collaboration of the MES survey information to the SAT scores of these students and ELEOT observation information of these classes will provide two additional lenses by which to understand student motivation.

**SAT Data**

The Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) was collected from the most recent scores by students in the fall of 2021. The current research study analyzes the data from the 27 participants in relation to the MES scores. Of the 27 students, 25 took the full battery of SAT tests, leaving the test group represented in the tables below. This SAT information reflects the performance of average students on grade level and has overall scores on the SAT test for their grade level. This



can be seen in the information found in Table 5 which provides the average scores for fifth through eighth grade students and provides descriptive statistics for students in the research study.

**Table 5**

*Stanford Achievement Test Data*

	Mean	Mode	Std. Dev.	Range
Reading	672.40	679.00	36.50	154.00
Math	633.72	637.00	24.04	112.00
Grade Equivalence	6.30	5.90	2.63	9.40
National Rank	52.84	62.00	22.85	90.00
Stanine	5.28	4.00	1.46	7.00

From Table 5, the mean score for math is 672.40 and for reading is 633.72. These scores provide an average for the student performance and reveal most students are average performers in the SAT testing process. These scores also describe a stanine mean score of 5.28 out of nine, meaning the stanine score for the group is average. This means the average scores for this subset of students is a solid representation of the student body at Regents. The 27 students in the study are not necessarily high achievers but provide a good cross-section of students from various ability levels on the SAT testing results.

With these quantitative data points, encouraging motivation and engagement is enhanced by reviewing qualitative survey information, which provided the reasoning behind the survey answers given by the students. The following teacher, administration, and student focus group

information provided a qualitative answer to why students are motivated to learn and are engaged in the classroom.

**Teacher Focus Group Data**

Several themes emerged throughout the teacher focus group process, which mirrors the MES information and provided six significant conversation categories. The researcher invited 19 teachers to participate in the teacher focus group. There were five teachers who chose to participate, providing a 26% participation rate for the faculty focus group. Additionally, the program evaluation invited eight administrators to participate in the focus group and five were able to participate for a 55% participation rate for the administrative team. In the table below the numbers represent the major themes and how many times these themes were mentioned by the focus group.

**Table 6**

*Teacher Focus Group*

	Teachers	Administration
Student Teacher Relationship	14	14
High Expectations	12	9
Vibrant Teaching Methods	8	13
Clear Purpose for Education	7	7
Discussion Based Classes	2	1
Community within the School	6	7
Education Valued by Parents	1	4

Within these categories (See Table 6), the student-to-teacher relationship was identified as the highest importance for the teachers, followed by high expectations. This dynamic points to the expression of our teachers in the focus group information that when teachers have high expectations coupled with loving, supportive relationships with the student, the student's motivation and engagement are encouraged. This theme resonated throughout the study in several focus group interactions and the survey data of the MES.

Additionally, the teachers added vibrant teaching methods to encourage motivation and engagement within the classroom. These conversations with the teachers displayed a strong connection between student-to-teacher relationships and self-belief, which was examined in the MES data. Self-belief is encouraged primarily by the teacher in the classroom. It comes from teachers speaking in positive ways about the class and speaking in positive ways to individual students. Finally, valuing was connected to high expectations by the teachers because when a teacher held a rigorous expectation, the student understood the importance of the subject matter. For example, teachers expressed homework must have value and be quickly graded to show the students the work was important and meaningful for their educational experience. The teachers throughout the conversation supported these categories in the MES.

### **Student Focus Group Data**

The students also mirrored the teachers' responses, saying the student-to-teacher relationships are critical for motivation; however, the students also indicated high expectations as necessary for continued motivation and engagement. Within the student focus groups, the fifth grade had seven participants, the sixth grade had five participants, and the seventh grade had seven participants with 19 students participating, providing a 76% participation rate for those students who took the MES survey.

**Table 7**

***Student Focus Group***

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	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	Total
Student Teacher Relationship	18	12	3	33
High Expectations	9	19	12	40
Vibrant Teaching Methods	20	7	6	33
Clear Purpose for Education	15	10	6	31
Discussion Based Classes	0	1	5	6
Community within the School	3	3	5	11

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Within Table 7, the results reveal high expectations were mentioned 40 times, with the highest percentage of these responses coming from the sixth grade. Interestingly, the students desire a fast-paced, well-organized classroom and have an objective for learning. These dynamics are critical for students to feel their educational activities are not wasted. Additionally, students desire a student-to-teacher relationship and a vibrant teaching environment, mentioned 33 times each. Vibrant teaching seemed to be more critical to the younger students, and a clear purpose for the educational process was more important to the older students. This dynamic would seem to indicate a changing value set as students move through their middle school years.

Additionally, a clear purpose for education is essential being mentioned 31 times by the students. This indicates the students desire a higher reason for attending school, and they want the school to have a cohesive approach to the school's mission. When the mission permeates the whole culture into every classroom, the students are motivated to learn.

## ELEOT Teacher Observation Data

The ELEOT observations are used to provide feedback to the teachers about students' engagement in the classroom. The observation is built on seven categories which are equitable learning, high expectations, supportive learning, active learning, progress monitoring, well-managed learning, and digital learning. These categories emphasized the areas of importance the administrative leadership has expected from the teaching process. In Table 8 below, the most recent scores from each teacher have been averaged to provide descriptive statistics to provide a snapshot of teacher success in each area.

**Table 8**

*Positive Category Averages*

	Mean	Mode	Std. Dev.	Range
Equitable Learning	3.58	4.00	.48	1.25
High Expectations	3.55	3.80	.43	1.20
Supportive Learning	3.73	4.00	.33	.75
Active Learning	3.56	4.00	.51	1.75
Progress Monitoring	3.42	4.00	.59	1.50
Well Managed Learning	3.67	4.00	.60	1.75
Digital Learning	2.46	4.00	1.40	3.00

Based on the information in Table 8, the teachers scored the highest in supportive learning with an average score of 3.73. This points to the fact the administrative leadership recognizes the supportive nature of the classroom with the students. Additionally, the second highest score area is well-managed learning, with an average score of 3.67. Again, this means

the administrative leadership has observed a well-managed, structured learning environment. Following these two scores are the categories of active and equitable learning, meaning the classroom with engaging and vibrant teacher methods were used regularly.

### **Review of Research Questions**

Several questions drove the process of addressing the problem of student apathy in the classroom. First, the research program sought to better understand the dynamics of students' motivation and engagement at Regents. These questions stem from the outlined areas of research reviewed and primarily address if classroom engagement is affected by supportive relationships on campus, vibrant teaching techniques, and school culture as created through implementing policies and procedures for the students.

### **Factors that Encourage Motivation and Engagement**

The central question is how can the school improve the motivation (attitudes) and engagement (behaviors) of middle school students? To understand these dynamics in the classroom, the research program sought to discover what factors encourage student motivation and engagement. The results revealed three key factors from the data that encourage motivation and engagement which are valuing the educational process, a student's self-belief about their ability, and maintaining a learning focus in the classroom. First, the MES revealed the category of valuing as the highest indicator reported by the students with an average score of 85. This means the students understood the value of the educational process in the classroom and prioritized the school's activities as necessary in their experience of life. This theme is supported throughout the focus group data as the teachers and administration identified the educational endeavors of the school as the primary purpose and activity of the culture by mentioning the importance of purpose over fourteen times throughout the focus group. The valuing of the

educational process comes from the mission of the Regents permeating all levels of the learning environment.

Second, the MES revealed self-belief was crucial in encouraging motivation and engagement with an average score of 84.07. Self-belief is fueled by a robust student-to-teacher relationship identified in the focus group information by students as highly important mentioning this dynamic over thirty-three times throughout the focus group. The students identified in the focus group the development of self-belief comes from the heart of the teacher in their ability to create a joyful learning environment in which the student feels positive and supported in the learning process.

Third, the MES revealed learning focus was critical in developing motivation and engagement with a score of 83.52. Within the teacher focus group information, learning focus is articulated as vibrant teaching methods that hold the student's attention. The need for a focused learning environment was mentioned twenty-one times throughout the focus group interactions. Additionally, the ELEOT observation data showed one of the highest scores with 3.67 out of four. The factors of valuing, self-belief, and learning focus are fostered by the school's leadership and coupled with supportive student-to-teacher relationships and high classroom expectations, students report they motivated and engaged in the culture of Regents. The dovetailing of these dynamics encourages self-belief, valuing of education, and learning focus in the classroom. If these cultural elements are fostered within the school, the students will have the best opportunity to engage in the learning process.

### **Classroom Teaching Practices**

Additionally, the research program sought to understand what types of classroom teaching practices and activities improve motivation and engagement for middle school students

of Regents? The results revealed students were engaged by a dynamic teaching process and the teacher's excitement, passion, and preparation. In two focus groups, students indicated that the learning process started with a solid relationship between student and teacher, but these vibrant teaching methods perpetuated motivation and engagement by keeping the student's attention with meaningful learning activities. Throughout the student focus groups, vibrant teaching was mentioned thirty-three times and specifically, students desired teachers to utilize games, discussions, drama, and projects within class to keep their attention. Within the ELEOT observation data active learning scored a 3.56 out of four which indicates the administration witnessed active learning that engaged students in the classroom. When active learning techniques are used creatively and engagingly, students are motivated; however, the engagement is contingent on the teacher's abilities more than the method itself.

### **Classroom Technology**

Furthermore, the study sought to understand if classroom technology encouraged motivation and engagement at Regents. The students did not indicate in the focus groups that technology was a helpful learning tool; however, the students did mention digital learning methods were not critical to their experience. Within the focus groups, one student referred to a teacher who only used digital tools such as google classroom and slides as "boring." This indicates vibrant teaching techniques of expression and passion are much more critical to a student than digital formats. In the ELEOT observation data, the lowest scores were recorded in digital learning with a 2.46 out of four; however, the teacher's demeanor and engagement and how they used these tools in the classroom made the experience engaging and motivating. Although the teachers have used digital tools in the classroom more often as reported by the ELEOT observations, the students did not report these efforts affected their motivation and



engagement when asked in the focus group information. The use of Smart Board technology and other forms of digital learning may help with classroom engagement, however the training necessary to reach a quality usefulness was not evident in the culture of Regents.

### **Socratic Teaching Methods**

The study sought to understand if Socratic teaching methods encourage motivation and engagement at Regents. Students did indicate the use of discussion-based learning and, in particular, Socratic circles were helpful for classroom engagement. However, from the focus group information only the seventh and eighth grade classes were using Socratic circles in their classes. Primarily, the seventh grade group articulated the use of Socratic circles to be helpful for their experience. The teacher focus group information reflected the teachers saw a difference in the engagement of students in the classroom by using discussion-based classes. When teachers relied heavily on lecture style teaching, the teachers indicated they would lose the attention of the students. The discussion-based learning is supported by the MES data collected from the students and through the ELEOT observation data collected by the administration. Within the MES, learning focus referred to the classroom environment which is structured and active. Discussion-based classes foster the learning focus seen in the MES. Additionally, the ELEOT observation data showed active learning in the classroom and students have articulated the use of Socratic methods as a key ingredient to engagement in the classroom.

### **Supportive Relationships**

Along with classroom teaching methods, the research program sought to understand if supportive relationships with teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom. The research data showed supportive relationships was the most important factor in the learning culture. The focus group data repeatedly identified student-to-teacher relationships

as the foundation for quality, motivating, and engaging classrooms. For example, one group stated that the learning process begins with the teacher “liking me” or “is for me” as a foundation for learning. Additionally, the ELEOT information revealed supportive learning as a high score within the other domains of engagement of 3.73 out of four. Finally, the teachers also stated the relationship with the student is the key factor to pushing the students in the classroom. The research showed students appreciated a teacher who revealed themselves in the process of teaching. Developing teacher rapport with the student is a relational art to be developed to foster motivation and engagement. This rapport is developed through a teacher asking meaningful questions for discussion and providing quality connections between the purpose of the school with their discipline of study and relevance to the student's life.

### **Mentoring Program**

Additionally, the program sought to understand if a mentoring program encouraged motivation and engagement at Regents. The mentoring program consisted in dividing the students among the faculty and asking the faculty to informally ask questions about each student's experience at Regents. The answers to these questions were gathered and given to the administration in order to prioritize a response to the students who exhibit motivation and engagement struggles in the classroom. Although the mentoring program was a formal way of ensuring each student was connected to a teacher, the students reported their classroom teacher was more important than a formal mentor. The students' connection to the person teaching was the linchpin to motivation and engagement for the student. The teachers reported in the focus groups the mentoring program did not foster a quality relationship from their perspective. In many ways the mentoring program did not provide the desired outcomes. Teachers were unsure about their responsibilities in the process and students were not connected to their mentor in a

meaningful way. More often a student wanted a rapport with a teacher who teaches them outside of classroom. In the focus groups students indicated the relational connects to the teacher when they came to athletic events, fine art performances, or other activities the student might have. These efforts by the teachers cause a relational rapport and encouraged the student's efforts in the classroom.

### **Guidance Counselor**

Finally, the program sought to understand if a guidance counselor would encourage motivation and engagement at Regents. Unfortunately, this portion of the study was not completed as planned. The budgetary restraints of COVID and the priority of the other projects outweighed this potential hire. Because of this decision, the program study did not include the use a guidance counselor. Regents will move forward at some point with hiring this position because it is needed for the school culture. However, at this point the school relies on the work of the teachers care for the students.

### **Policies and Procedures**

In the final element of the program, the research study sought to understand if the adjustment of school policies and procedures affects the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom. It is clear that policies and procedures in the school do affect the motivation and engagement of students at Regents. Many policies of the school follow a traditional model of education and has been accepted as the tradition of the school; however, changes to these policies can have a positive impact upon the students.

### **Grading Policies**

Specifically, the program asked questions about how the grading policies and procedures affect student motivation and engagement in the classroom? Although students did not mention

the change of policies in their focus groups, the teachers did indicate the changing of policies and procedures would have a positive impact on the classroom. Furthermore, the teachers talked about the policy of having at least nine grades, three of which must be test grades, in the gradebook each quarter. Teachers indicated this policy created busy work assignments to fulfill a policy guideline and impeded true learning in the process. In the student focus group some students indicated the grades were important to their parents, but overall, the grading system was not the driving motivation for their performance. They did indicate grades became more important in high school when GPA begins to count toward college admission. Within the ELEOT observation data, the scores revealed students clearly understood the expectations to receive good grades; however, the grading policies were not a major theme discussed within the student focus groups. In the teacher focus groups, the teachers talked about a way to provide a narrative form of grading in which the student would be included in the parent-teacher conferences, similar to a performance review within the context of employment. This would allow students to express their perspective in the learning process and allow parents to speak directly to the teacher with the student present. This grading policy would be in addition to the traditional forms of grading and would allow an in-depth, relational approach to the student within the evaluation process.

### **Teacher Observation Tool**

In addition to grading policies, the research study sought to understand if the teacher observation protocol to focus on student engagement would improve motivation and engagement in the classroom? Over the past year, the ELEOT observation tool has provided a quality feedback mechanism for the administrative leadership to direct the teachers. The ELEOT observation scores only provide a snapshot of scores and do not show improvement per se.

However, longitudinal data could be created to determine if improving motivation and engagement is possible. The retention numbers of the school and the student satisfaction survey data would suggest students are more engaged now than in previous years, indicating the ELEOT observation tool has helped the engagement of students in the classroom. Over the past three years, the retention rate for the student has increased from 84% in the fall of 2019 to 94% retention in the fall of 2021. Specifically, the retention of middle school students has increased, given the impetus for this current research study was to address the attrition rates for middle school students in the past.

In conclusion, the program evaluation findings have shown a positive increase in motivation and engagement for Regents. This improvement comes from strong supportive relationships, high standards clearly articulated through the purpose of the school, and vibrant teaching methods used by the teachers in the classroom. The leadership of Regents can conclude that the motivation and engagement program can positively impact the school culture to encourage continuous improvement of the school.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The results of the motivation and engagement research program have revealed several key areas of discussion for the leadership of Regents School of Oxford. Throughout chapter five, the discussion will seek to provide a clear interpretation, synthesis, and analysis of the findings to provide insight for the continuous improvement of the Regents school environment. Second, the main limitations of the study will be explored and explained. And third, recommendations will be provided for the leadership of Regents about encouraging motivation and engagement for students in the classroom.

### **Discussion**

The action research applied in the setting of Regents provided a context in which relationships are the foundation of the educational process. The main finding throughout the study showed the student-to-teacher relationship was the cornerstone of the motivation and engagement of students of Regents. The positive and encouraging relationships form a culture in which students are inundated with excitement about learning and empowered to believe they can learn. This culture is established within each classroom context and begins with the teacher's ability to build rapport with students. This dynamic has two key elements. First, students have articulated a desire for high academic standards and expectations. And second, students have articulated a desire for relational support provided by the teacher in the classroom.

The Regents students in middle school have stated motivation is built upon having solid relationships with the teachers on campus. Specifically, when students have an adult advocate,

they feel supported and motivated to learn. When students lose motivation and engagement, it is mainly because they do not feel supported by the teacher. It is articulated clearly when a student states the teacher believes in them as a student or is dedicated to helping them learn. These types of statements point to the fact students need an adult in the classroom to believe in them as a student. Supportive teacher relationships provide the internal motivation which leads to the external behaviors of engagement. The student-to-teacher relationship is fostered in the classroom through teaching and are not necessarily found in a formal mentoring program or school counselors. Teachers need to be relationally aware of every student to properly motivate them and this implies the teacher must work to get to know the student outside the classroom and teach them with passion and excitement inside the classroom.

Additionally, students are motivated by motivated teachers at Regents. It is evident through the study students are motivated by the teachers at Regents who love to teach and are genuinely excited about the learning process. A motivated teacher at Regents is passionate about their subject area, prepared for their daily classes, and having vibrant teaching methods. First, a passionate teacher at Regents teaches from the wave of their learning, allowing curiosity to permeate the task of learning. Students and teachers spoke of a joyful classroom where the teacher truly loves to learn throughout the study. Second, the motivated teacher at Regents is well-prepared for their classes. This preparation means the teacher knows the lesson to be taught to a profound degree allowing the students to ask questions about the subject matter to explore the topic thoroughly. When a teacher is not well prepared, the students are affected by the impact and struggle with engagement. Third, the motivated teacher at Regents has a vibrant classroom environment. This means the teacher finds fun and creative ways to communicate the lessons. This can be seen in developing songs, jingles, and chants to memorize information or

creating games to review information for tests. When a teacher at Regents only lectures or relies on worksheets to drive the class, the students reported they struggled in the classroom. In addition to these engaging activities, the teacher designs questions to drive the class process in order to create a conversation to engage all students within the class. Although these discussions are more sophisticated at older ages, these questions are designed to engage the child and prick the mind to encourage motivation. These discussions are balanced with the teacher summarizing main points and filling the gaps of knowledge within the conversations to facilitate learning.

Throughout the study, the students and teachers at Regents mentioned the value of conversations beyond the classroom. Students want to know how the topics they study will apply to their life in the real world. This was articulated throughout by ensuring a clear purpose for the educational process. In the case of Regents, the Christian faith of the mission statement provided a meaningful structure for purpose and connected the experience of learning into a meaningful activity. Regents school leadership must ensure the purpose is articulated, taught, and driven by every teacher and staff member. Without a clear purpose, the students experience a fractured educational process in which they develop their own motivation based on grades or status, or, in some cases, lose motivation altogether.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations within the study at Regents that must be stated to better understand the dynamics of motivation and engagement. First, the study is based on understanding what motivates and engages students in the classroom at Regents. In order to fully understand these dynamics, motivated and unmotivated students need to be interviewed and surveyed. However, given the participatory nature of the study at Regents, only motivated students would complete the survey and focus group activities. When recruiting for



participation, several students asked if the activity was required. Once they understood the participatory nature of the research, they chose not to be involved. Therefore, the research only examines the motivated and engaged student perspective. This is unfortunate as the voice of the unmotivated student should be clearly understood. The only way to accomplish the participation of unmotivated students would be to require unmotivated students to take the survey and participate in the focus groups.

Second, to truly understand the dynamics of motivation and engagement at Regents, a longitudinal study should be implemented. Given the nature of action research, a snapshot of data from Regents is collected to determine motivation and engagement of the students. However, several years of data should be gathered and utilized to understand students' perspectives. As an educational leader at Regents, the survey data should be implemented as a standard form of data collection at the school so that year-to-year analysis can be conducted to calibrate the motivation and engagement of the students. This can easily be added to the typical processes of standardized testing for the students throughout the year.

Third, the study at Regents was conducted during the COVID pandemic, and all results may be skewed given the unprecedented approach to education at the school during the last two years. Within the Spring semester of 2020, Regents became fully virtual for the last quarter of school. Although the virtual setting allowed students and teachers to learn the digital tools necessary for teaching, the school lost educational momentum, and the overall learning experience suffered for the students. For this reason, Regents resolved to remain open during the 2020-2021 academic school year. With several social distancing parameters in place, the school provided in-person education; however, the relational aspects of the educational process were affected. The dynamics caused by COVID may have provided an overreaction in the reporting

of the focus groups. For example, since the school prevented relational interaction from class to class, the focus groups may be emphasizing the relational nature of motivation and engagement simply because the students were not allowed to experience relational interaction over the past year. Additionally, the COVID dynamics may have created an aversion to virtual learning and digital tools in the classroom because of the overuse of these tools over the past few years.

Fourth, the money was not available to hire a guidance counselor. In the original program creation, the program called for the hiring of a guidance counselor in order to better serve the students at Regents. Given the challenges of COVID over the past two years the School Board decided it would be best to spend the extra money in the budget to mitigate the risks of the pandemic. The strategic planning efforts of the school moved the hiring of a guidance counselor forward into the 2023-2024 academic school year budget. Because of this setback portions of the program will not be covered in the conclusion and recommendations.

Although these limitations exist in the results of the current research, the information contained in the program evaluation is still reliable and accurate. The program evaluation standards clearly provide evidence that the current research is useful and will aid the school leadership in the process of continuous improvement.

### **Program Evaluation Standards**

The current research study provides a high level of utility for the educational leadership of Regents. The study results can be used to calibrate the Regents culture of learning in a way previously misunderstood. By capturing data each year about the nuances of motivation and engagement reported by the students at Regents, data-driven decisions can be determined about addressing teacher evaluation, cultural challenges, and academic rigor and can be used for continuous improvement at Regents. Specifically, teacher evaluations can be reshaped based on

the motivation and engagement survey, and feedback organized based on each class experience. This would provide a snapshot for each teacher to determine how well they motivate and engage the students. Additionally, the MES survey data can be utilized to calibrate the culture of the school. The administrative leadership can make changes to policies and procedures based on the information collected by gaining a year-to-year gauge on student motivation. Coupled with student satisfaction surveys the leadership can determine cultural changes to modify the student's experience. Finally, the leadership can use the results of the study to calibrate academic rigor. The survey provides an academic temperature of the student's classroom teacher and in the school experience as a whole.

As the development of the current research study at Regents moved forward, the feasibility to perpetuate the study has become more realistic. The evaluation of motivation and engagement must become part of the fabric of assessment within the school culture. Not only can the current research be a tool to measure a healthy culture at Regents, but it can also be easily used within other school contexts to measure the motivation and engagement of students. Using the MES survey, SAT data, ELEOT observation, and student focus groups, the study can be easily replicated in other settings to assess a healthy culture within a school. This feasibility would allow schools to compare academic cultures and learn from one another.

The propriety of the current research study at Regents seeks to serve all the school's teachers, students, and parents. The nature of the motivation and engagement study ensures all stakeholders are represented and probes the academic culture for students who feel overlooked or excluded from the learning process. It is vital to ensure all students are being cared for at a high level in the school setting. Several students expressed gratitude for being involved in the focus groups and the survey process. Based on these interactions the students felt represented and that

their voice was being considered in the changes of the school. A program such as the motivation and engagement program focus on the experience of the student, which ultimately serves the parents of the school. The parents also expressed gratitude for the school leadership examining a cultural issue that practically affects them within the home as they struggle through homework with their children. These parents are eager to hear about the results of the study to provide clarity in the learning process.

By utilizing the MES survey, SAT data, ELEOT observation information, and the quality of the focus group feedback, the accuracy of the program evaluation at Regents ensures high quality information for the study. The MES survey is nationally recognized, and the SAT is a quality test vetted by many schools across the nation. The ELEOT observation tool is used in the Cognia accreditation processes and provides quality feedback for the study. By using these evaluation tools in conjunction with focus groups information, the accuracy of the study is maximized. Therefore, the study utilizes an accurate system by which to assess the nature of motivation and engagement at the school.

Given the quality of the overall research study at Regents, the study's level of accountability incorporates all the evaluation factors of utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. By ensuring the other factors are completed with a high level of quality, the accountability of the study is perpetuated. The ultimate accountability for the motivation and engagement program is the parents of the students served by the teachers. Given the nature of an independent, private school which relies on tuition dollars for revenue, the parents will ultimately decide if quality education is occurring at the school through their decision to enroll. Over the past five years Regents has seen a growth pattern of five to ten percent per year and the enrollment has increased from 198 in 2017 to 315 in 2022. The predicted retention rate for the

current year is 94% and the enrollment prediction for the fall of 2022 is 370 students. Clearly, from this increase, the Oxford community has seen the educational benefits of a Regents experience. The current study is a piece of this accountability to parents and is a reflection of the trust established within the community of the school.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the research gathered in this study, there is a clear determination of how the dynamics of motivation and engagement are developed in the school culture of Regents. First, the academic culture at Regents values education which means the adults on campus all understand the most important activity at the school is learning. The learning activity must be valued by ensuring the students understand the purpose of the school is intellectual and academic growth for a specific purpose. In the case of Regents, this foundation is built upon Christian service to the community due to leadership development within the students. This process must be accomplished with the context of high expectations in the classroom coupled with supportive, caring, and loving interactions with the teacher. Because education at Regents is primarily a relational activity, every child must have a solid relationship with the teacher in which they feel the teacher believes in them as a student.

From the program evaluation information reviewed the middle school student tends to lose connection with a specific teacher through the middle school years because their experience moves from having an exclusive teaching experience with one specific teacher in the elementary years, to having have four to five teachers throughout the day in a middle school experience at Regents. This changing dynamic causes the student to lose a connection with a specific teacher given the fact they change classes throughout the day. Without a clear purpose to bind the educational experience together in a cohesive message the student experiences a fractured

learning process and is left to form their own purpose for learning. Clearly, throughout the middle school experience at Regents, students lose educational fervor and struggle with apathy based on the relational and missional fracturing of the experience. In order to address the issue the school leadership at Regents should provide intentional connections with the teachers to provide solid relationships for middle school students.

Second, students value deep and meaningful conversations within and outside the classroom at Regents. Throughout the research study, students articulated gratitude for a teacher who could take time to ask questions with real-life implications in the development of wisdom. An example of this type of questioning flows out of the school's history and literature curriculum. The students are asked a series of discussion-based questions about the text they are studying. When the teacher takes these themes and connects them to the current events of our culture, the relevance level of the discussion increases and lends itself to engagement and motivation. Taking the class one step further, the teacher would connect these themes to aspects of wisdom so that students can discuss how we are to understand these themes and approach the culture with a winsome demeanor and elicit change for the greater good. These types of deep and meaningful conversations are desired and appreciated by the students of Regents and encourage the students to think deeply about their purpose in life. As students move through the middle school years there is an awakening in which each student expresses a desire to understand the world in new ways. Engaging students with a discussion-based classroom allows the space for our students to ask the questions they want to ask and provides a conduit for the teacher to impart wisdom. When middle school students at Regents are simply asked to regurgitate the memorized answers their motivation and engagement fades because they view this as a meaningless activity devoid of relevance to their life.

Third, students at Regents also recognize the school's policies and procedures reveal the institution's value set. More importantly, how these policies are implemented and enforced in the school culture is equally important. Policies enforced devoid of a relationship feel cold and harsh as reported by the students. In contrast, unenforced policies communicate a lack of belief in the policies and procedures of the school's mission. Again, the administration of Regents must provide quality relationships as the context for accountability to communicate the school's values. Students clearly articulated they are motivated to a high level when policies are enforced with support and care. The administration should seek to provide opportunities for accountability that invite the student into a conversation about their performance or behavior. Often forms of behavior modification work on younger students because they are motivated to behave based on treats or threats. When the developmental changes occur in the middle school years these modifications cease to work because the students realize the meaninglessness of the award system. The middle school students of Regents need the adult interaction in order for the educational process to have meaningful outcome and all the policies of the school must support and reflect the mission of the school. In the middle school years students seek to understand and criticize the internal logic of arguments. Therefore, all policies and procedures of the school must reflect the value of the mission to encourage motivation of the students within the culture.

Fourth, a full understanding of anxiety should be explored in the teacher training process for Regents in future years. Anxiety is the negative effect of conscientiousness, meaning a conscientious student who is completing their assignments and fully engaged in class may at times become overwhelmed by the educational process and struggle with anxiety. The job of the teachers at Regents is to calibrate the educational experience, so the conscientious student

remains engaged without causing unnecessary anxiety. The dynamic of calibrating the learning experience implies the teacher knows each student individually and therefore can communicate clearly with the student when the teacher recognizes the symptoms of anxiety. These teachers can read the student by clearly understanding the dynamics of self-belief, learning focus, and valuing outlined in the MES survey data. When a student struggles, they will show signs of misunderstanding the value of education, become unfocused in class, and doubt they are able to complete the assignments given by the teacher. The teacher can use anxiety as a gauge and recognize these dynamics and make changes in the classroom environment. Unfortunately, in our culture at Regents any sign of struggle becomes a concern and rather than letting conscientious students feel the stress of schoolwork the educational leadership of the school lowers the bar of expectation. By doing this the school erodes the mission of learning and ultimately, the student is hobbled out of supportive concern.

### **Recommendations**

There are several recommendations for the educational leadership at Regents based on the research reviewed in this project. First, the leadership of Regents should ensure teachers consider the whole child in the educational process. This implies the teachers should care for the student by understanding the student's intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth. The essence of education is relational activity meaning teachers should make time throughout the day to get to know the student individually. This can be done by creating a standard list of questions to assess each student. Every teacher needs to take on elementary levels of counseling in the classroom for each student. When students display excessive personal issues, they can involve professional services outside of Regents; however, every student needs a level of relational connection to be motivated to learn. The teachers of Regents should start by creating this



connection with each student, expressing a belief in each child, and holding them to a high expectation of student performance.

Second, the leadership of Regents should require teachers to hold a high, rigorous standard in the classroom. The administration should encourage teachers to create deep, meaningful conversations throughout their curriculum and daily lesson plans. Specifically, the introduction and increased use of Socratic circles in fifth and sixth grade will allow space to have quality conversations in the context of middle school classes. Additionally, the lesson plans should reflect questions based on the text of the area of study to guide the daily conversations, questions based on the cultural issues with the same thematic basis, and the teacher should include questions to encourage how to think about the themes presented. Finally, the teacher should sum up these deep discussions to clarify and reiterate points of importance for the class. This process of summarizing the discussion is vital for students to be grounded in learning. In addition, this process will allow for the development of a worldview based on the mission and purpose of the school. The students at Regents desire high expectations in classroom and from their teachers. This communicates the teacher believes the students can complete the work to be accomplished.

Third, the leadership of Regents should create a culture within the school that values the learning environment by including the students in the assessment process for grading. When students are included in the process of grading through narrative feedback with the teacher and parent, the motivation of the student can be assessed. These meetings with the student should occur at the end of each quarter and include a review of the student's grades, behavior, and attendance before the meeting. The purpose of the meeting would be to encourage the student to continue working hard in their educational endeavors and care for their holistic needs. This

conversation would feel like a performance review and include an element of self-evaluation. Overall, the experience should feel encouraging for a Regents student and provide clear goals for growth and change beyond their grade report.

Fourth, leadership of Regents should create an anchor event in the child's weekly experience to express the institution's values. Habits express values important to the student experience of school. A weekly program to instill the purpose and mission of the school will provide the opportunity for not only the students to be taught, but also the teachers to integrate the experience into their daily classes. This weekly program provides a community connection for the students and binds the learning community together in a shared learning task. This process communicates the importance of learning and allows a common language of excellence to be used within the community. For Regents this can be accomplished through the revamping of the chapel program to be more intentional with the communication of mission and vision. The chapel program should take advantage of the platform to communicate the mission of the school, the portrait of the graduate, and the opportunities for service in the community. Ultimately the chapel program should be a weekly reminder of why they are at the school and engage the student in the process of learning at a motivational level.

Fifth, the leadership of Regents should encourage vibrant teaching methods within the classroom. In the observation process, the teachers should be assessed on accomplishing the objective of the class through the use of discussion-based, project-based, and problem-based teaching. This will encourage the student's motivation and engagement in the learning process because it goes beyond the simple regurgitation of information. The leadership of Regents should challenge the simple overuse of worksheets to ensure students are actively learning at all times. Additionally, teachers should incorporate discussion-based classes around these project-

based and problem-based learning opportunities. Finally, teachers should look for opportunities to incorporate games, songs, chants, and jingles into the learning process to help provide a mechanism for memorization.

Sixth, leadership of Regents should reconsider their current policies around class sizes limit the class size for a standard classroom. For optimal learning which incorporates strong student to teacher relationships and hold high expectations the class size should be limited to fifteen kids per teacher in the middle school grades. Although this would cost more for the school budget and may raise tuition at Regents, the extra money would be well spent. Limiting class size to fifteen students per class would allow the teacher to know each child individually, help with classroom management issues, and allow more time for vibrant teaching methods to be used in the classroom. Smaller classes ensure all the students are properly engaged and motivated by the teacher.

In conclusion, the motivation and engagement program at Regents provides several practical recommendations for the school culture. The development of these practices in the school culture at Regents will encourage students to become connected to the teachers, one another, and the school community. These relational connections encourage, shape, and direct the students' learning activities and fuel the students' motivation within the school community. When students are surrounded by a supportive community with a cohesive desire to learn, they will rise to the teachers' expectations and meet their full learning potential.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

Table 1 provides the elements and details of the action plan.

Elements	Goals	Timeline	Who	Resource
1. Increase Awareness of Internal Student Issues that affect Motivation and Engagement	The goal of this element is to fully understand the issues that students believe affect their motivation and engagement in the classroom and communicate those issues and concerns to the teachers.			
1A. Teacher Training on Student Motivation and Engagement	Educate Teachers about the dynamics of motivation and engagement in the classroom and equip them to improve and enhance the learning environment.	Fall 2021	HOS Principal Teacher	\$1500
1B. Mentoring Program to connect Students to Teachers	Provide opportunities for the students to have a meaningful connection with the teachers outside of the classroom.	Fall 2021	DES Principal Teacher	
1C. Hiring of a Part-Time Guidance Counselor	Provide a resource for students that have counseling needs and provide the administration with guidance on making quality decisions about a student's well-being in the classroom	Fall 2021	HOS Principal	\$20,000
2. Increase Awareness of Teaching Strategies and Techniques that promote Motivation and Engagement	The goal of this element is to understand how the teaching strategies and techniques used by the teachers affect the motivation and engagement of students.			

2A. ELEOT Observation	To emphasize the student engagement behaviors in the assessment of classrooms and teachers.	Fall 2020	HOS Principal	
2B. Socratic Teaching Method	To provide discussion-based learning in the classroom built on the dialogue of students with the teacher and with one another.	Fall 2020	Principal Teacher	
2C. Technology in the Classroom	To provide technology that would enhance and engage the student in the process of learning.	Fall 2021	Principal Teacher	\$1500
3. Update the Policies and Procedures of the School to enhance Motivation and Engagement	The goal of this element is to determine how the policies and procedures of the school affect the motivation and engagement of students in the classroom.	Spring 2020	HOS Principal School Board	
3A. Review Educational Policies with the Administration of the School	To change educational policies that inhibit the motivation and engagement of students and create policies that encourage the motivation and engagement of students.	Spring 2020	HOS Principal	
3B. Review Educational Policies with the Teachers of the School	To change educational policies that inhibit the motivation and engagement of students and create policies that encourage the motivation and engagement of students.	Spring 2020	HOS Principal Teacher	
3C. Review Educational Policies with the Students of the School	To change educational policies that inhibit the motivation and engagement of students and create policies that encourage the motivation and engagement.	Spring 2020	HOS Principal Teacher	

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## APPENDIX B



Office Use Only

### Motivation and Engagement Scale – Junior School

**Andrew J. Martin PhD**

Dear Student

Welcome to the Motivation and Engagement Scale – Junior School.

This survey has been given to you to examine your motivation and engagement, how you do your schoolwork, and what you think of yourself as a student.

There are no right or wrong answers. Just make sure that your answers show what you really think about yourself. When answering the questions, if you want to change an answer, just cross it out and circle the answer that you prefer. If you are not sure which answer to circle, just circle the one that is the closest to what you think. You should have only one answer for each question. For the purposes of the survey, it is best that you do not leave out any questions.

If before, during, or after the survey you have any concerns, please talk to your teacher, tutor, counselor, psychologist, or the person who gave you this survey.

There are some questions that are very similar to each other. This is not a trick. It is just that this type of survey needs to ask some similar questions in slightly different ways. Just answer them in a way that shows what you really think about yourself.

Thanks for your participation.

Before you start, here is an example:

Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5
			Disagree Strongly	Agree Strongly
I work hard at school				
			1	2
			3	④
			5	

This student circled Number 4 ('Agree') because he does work quite hard at school. He didn't circle Number 5 ('Agree Strongly') because he doesn't work hard all of the time. He didn't circle Number 3 ('Neither Agree nor Disagree') because he works hard most of the time.

Ask your teacher, psychologist, tutor, or counselor if you have any questions. You can now begin.

<b>Last Name</b> _____	<b>First Name</b> _____
<b>ID Number</b> _____	<b>Grade/Year</b> _____
<b>Gender (Circle)</b> Girl            Boy	<b>Age</b> _____ years



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This survey license expires 1 year from the date of purchase



## Motivation and Engagement Scale – Junior School

Andrew J. Martin PhD

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Agree Strongly
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH STATEMENT</b>					
1. If I can't understand my schoolwork, I keep trying until I do	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel very happy with myself when I really understand what I'm taught at school	1	2	3	4	5
3. I usually do my homework in places where I can concentrate	1	2	3	4	5
4. I'm able to use some of the things I learn at school in other parts of my life	1	2	3	4	5
5. Sometimes I don't try hard at school so I can have a reason if I don't do well	1	2	3	4	5
6. When I don't do well at school I don't know how to avoid that happening next time	1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel very happy with myself when I do well at school by working hard	1	2	3	4	5
8. Each week I'm trying less and less at school	1	2	3	4	5
9. If my homework is difficult, I keep working at it trying to figure it out	1	2	3	4	5
10. When I have a project to do, I worry about it a lot	1	2	3	4	5
11. The main reason I try at school is because I don't want people to think that I'm dumb	1	2	3	4	5
12. When I get a good mark I often don't know how I'm going to get that mark again	1	2	3	4	5
13. If I try hard, I believe I can do my schoolwork well	1	2	3	4	5
14. Learning at school is important	1	2	3	4	5
15. I don't really care about school anymore	1	2	3	4	5
16. When I get a bad mark I don't know how to avoid that happening next time	1	2	3	4	5
17. When I do homework, I get organized so I can do it well	1	2	3	4	5
18. I don't know how to get good marks at school	1	2	3	4	5





## Motivation and Engagement Scale – Junior School

Andrew J. Martin PhD

	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Agree Strongly
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH STATEMENT</b>				<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>
19. I worry about getting bad marks in tests and projects	1	2	3	4	5
20. The main reason I try at school is because I don't want people to think bad things about me	1	2	3	4	5
21. I usually have a plan for how to do my homework when I start it	1	2	3	4	5
22. I'm not involved in things like class activities and class discussion at school	1	2	3	4	5
23. If I don't give up, I believe I can do schoolwork that is hard	1	2	3	4	5
24. I sometimes don't work very hard at school so I can have a reason if I don't do well	1	2	3	4	5
25. I feel very happy with myself when what I learn at school shows me how something works	1	2	3	4	5
26. I feel very happy with myself when I learn new things at school	1	2	3	4	5
27. Before I start a project, I plan out how I am going to do it	1	2	3	4	5
28. When I'm taught something that doesn't make sense, I spend time to try to understand it	1	2	3	4	5
29. I've given up being interested in school	1	2	3	4	5
30. I have a plan for how to do my homework or projects when I start them	1	2	3	4	5
31. The main reason I try at school is because I don't want to disappoint my parents	1	2	3	4	5
32. When I do homework, I try to find a place where I can do it well	1	2	3	4	5
33. If I have enough time, I believe I can do well in my schoolwork	1	2	3	4	5
34. What I learn at school will be useful in the future	1	2	3	4	5
35. I sometimes waste time the night before a test so I can have a reason if I don't do well	1	2	3	4	5
36. I'll keep working at difficult schoolwork until I've figured it out	1	2	3	4	5





## Motivation and Engagement Scale – Junior School

Andrew J. Martin PhD

Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Agree Strongly	
1	2	3	4	5	
<b>PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH STATEMENT</b>					
37. When I do tests I don't feel very good	1	2	3	4	5
38. The main reason I try at school is because I don't want my teacher to think bad things about me	1	2	3	4	5
39. I usually stick to a homework plan	1	2	3	4	5
40. If I try hard enough, I believe I can do all my schoolwork	1	2	3	4	5
41. It's important to understand what I'm taught at school	1	2	3	4	5
42. I sometimes leave homework until the last moment so I can have a reason if I don't do so well	1	2	3	4	5
43. I worry about school and schoolwork	1	2	3	4	5
44. When I do homework, I usually do it where I can concentrate best	1	2	3	4	5

**THAT IS THE END OF THE SURVEY**

**PLEASE CHECK YOU HAVE ANSWERED ALL THE QUESTIONS**

**THANKS**



## APPENDIX C

### Student Focus Group Interview Protocol

*Research Topic:* Student Engagement and Motivation

*Research Question:* How can the school improve the motivation (attitudes) and engagement (behaviors) of middle school students? What factors contribute to improved motivation and engagement in the process of education?

*Conceptual Frameworks:* Student Engagement, Motivation, and Apathy

*Statement of Consent:* Thank you for taking the time to talk with me about your educational experience at your school. The information you share with me will be used for Regents School of Oxford to better understand how to engage and motivate students. Please be assured that your personal information will not be included in the results and I will not be sharing your personal responses with anyone at your school. I want you to feel that you are free share your thoughts and perceptions. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

### **Student Interview Questions**

#### *Icebreakers*

1. Tell me a bit about our school.
  - a. How long have you attended this school?
  - b. What makes our school different from other schools?

#### *Education*

1. How would you describe your experience here at your school?
2. How would you define the purpose of education at your school?

3. What is the most important activity going on at your school?
  - a. What makes this activity important?
  - b. Do you think it is an important activity? Why or why not?

### *Motivation*

1. What motivates you to learn at your school?
2. What are the classes in which you are most motivated?
  - a. What do you think causes you to be motivated in those classes?
  - b. What do you think causes you to be unmotivated in your other classes?
3. What activities/classes at school are the most relevant to you for the future of your life?

### *Engagement*

1. Who is your favorite teacher? (If they do not have a favorite teacher skip to question 2a.)
  - a. Why do you like this teacher?
  - b. How does this teacher teach in the classroom?
2. What does this teacher do differently from other teachers in the classroom?
- 2a. Within your school who has the most positive impact upon the future of your life?
  - a. Why do you find this person to be a positive influence?
  - b. How does this person support you at school?
3. What do you think is the attitude of your teachers toward the toward the students?
4. What do you think is the attitude of your teachers toward their job as a teacher?
  - a. Do they enjoy teaching?
  - b. Do they seem engaged in the school culture?
  - c. How do they engage you outside of the classroom?
5. Describe the characteristics of the best teacher ever.

- a. What would they do in the classroom?
- b. What would the class feel like?
- c. How would you act in the classroom?

*Apathy*

1. What do you not like about school?
2. What causes you to avoid studying or doing homework?
3. How has your perceptions/attitudes changed about school over the past three year?
4. If you could change something about your school experience, what would you change?

*Closing Question*

1. What is the ultimate purpose of school?
  - a. Why are you at this school?
  - b. Would you go to another school if you had the choice? Why or why not?

## VITA

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