Recommendations to Improve the Practice of Motivating Students Academically at

Brighton Middle School in Tennessee

by

Regina Moschitta

An Applied Research Report Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. The rationale for this study was that academically motivated students would benefit from improved grades, higher test scores, and strengthened relationships within the school culture. Furthermore, improving the practice of motivating students academically would benefit teachers, administrators, and the community in the form of higher teacher effectiveness scores, a more positive school climate, and increased school ratings. The central research question was: How can the practice of motivating students academically be improved at Brighton Middle School in Brighton, Tennessee? Data were collected using interviews, surveys, and a focus group to inform this applied research. While the quantitative data collected were analyzed using graphic representations of quantitative test results, qualitative data were analyzed by identifying codes and themes. Five recommendations were made, including greater principal presence in classrooms, more student collaboration, the establishment of positive parent contacts made by teachers, the recruitment of parents to serve on committees, and the scheduling of family academic work sessions.

Keywords: academic motivation, amotivation, autonomous motivation, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation

Role of the Researcher

Regina Moschitta currently teaches math intervention at Brighton Middle School. She has taught in the Tipton County public school system for the past 10 years. Before her time in the public school system, she taught at Central Day School, a private school in Collierville, Tennessee, for 12 years, including seven years teaching second grade and five years teaching middle school math. She also taught first and third grades for two and a half years at Lincoln Elementary School, a public school in Memphis, Tennessee. Her education includes a bachelor's degree from the University of Memphis, a master of education degree from Union University, and an education specialist degree in instruction and curriculum from Liberty University. She is currently pursuing a doctor of education in instruction and curriculum from Liberty University. Throughout her years of teaching, Regina has worked with students who do not turn in assignments, do not take advantage of opportunities to bring up their grades, and are not motivated to participate in academic activities. Regina is currently employed at the school where this research was conducted and is aware of the potential biases that may impact student motivation, including low socioeconomic status and lack of parental involvement. Economic stability and parental involvement may be protective factors against low student motivation. Additionally, teachers at Brighton Middle School may inadvertently contribute to a decline in motivation through their methods of providing instruction and feedback, their student–teacher relationships, and their communication styles. To maintain the integrity of this study, possible biases must be acknowledged; thus, the literature review and the results of the data collection and analysis are used to determine the study's practical recommendations.

Permission to Conduct Research

Permission to conduct the research was secured from Alan Willey, the principal of Brighton Middle School. This permission granted access to participants and information regarding students' academic motivation to make recommendations for addressing the issue being studied (see Appendix A).

Ethical Considerations

Doctoral students should be ethical in their approach to conducting research, collecting data from individuals, and analyzing data (Claxton & Michael, 2021). Ethical practices for applied research require that participants be treated fairly and endure minimal risks from their involvement in the study. Therefore, careful attention was paid to ensuring that participants were exposed to minimal risks, the research process was not deceptive in any way, and no discriminatory practices were used. Participants were selected via personal communication and included teachers, administrators, school personnel, and students from Brighton Middle School. Written parental consent was received for all student participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. Interviews were conducted in a private setting at the school with just the participant and the researcher in the room. All data and documents were stored electronically with password protection. The information contained in this report is not generalizable and will not be shared or distributed outside of Brighton Middle School. For these reasons, Institutional Review Board approval was not required.

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes (see Appendix B). This chapter of the report presents the Organizational Profile, an Introduction to the Problem, the Significance of the Research, the Purpose Statement, the Central Research Question, and Definitions for this Research.

Organizational Profile

The educational site for this study was Brighton Middle School, a rural public middle school in west Tennessee. The mission of Brighton Middle School is "to provide a safe and secure environment while promoting an education that challenges students to become productive citizens" (Brighton Middle School, 2022, p. 1). During the 2021–2022 school year, Brighton Middle School had 864 students and 43 teachers, yielding a student–teacher ratio of 20:1 (NCES, 2022). The student population was comprised of 283 sixth grade students, 273 seventh grade students, and 308 eighth grade students. A total of 426 female students and 438 male students attended Brighton Middle School during the 2021–2022 school year. Brighton Middle School had seven English language learners (R. A. Willey, personal communication, August 16, 2022). The student population was 73% White, 14.7% African American, 5.8% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 0.5% Native American or Hawaiian; additionally, 5% identified as being of two or more races (NCES, 2022). A total of 185 students qualified for and received free or reduced lunch in the 2019–2020 school year. Free and reduced lunch status was not available for the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 school years because all students received free meals during that time due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. The school administrators at Brighton Middle School include one principal and three assistant principals, a school resource officer, a school counselor, a school social worker, and an instructional facilitator. Brighton Middle School offers athletics, clubs, and an after-school program. Athletic opportunities included football, basketball, track and field, cross country, soccer, cheerleading, volleyball, and tennis. Available clubs include Gifted Educated Motivated Servants and Girls Who Code. Additionally, the Cardinal Club is an afterschool program that offers a hot meal and activities that support students academically, emotionally, and physically. Brighton Middle School also offers free before- and after-school tutoring for language arts and math.

Introduction to the Problem

The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. When asked to complete a survey, 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School responded. To provide participants with a clear understanding of what was meant by low academic motivation, the survey identified examples of low academic motivation, including students who do not complete assignments, neglect to turn in assignments, do not take advantage of opportunities to make test corrections, or do not take advantage of opportunities to redo assignments for which they earned low scores. The first question asked in the survey was used to determine if teachers believed students' lack of motivation was a problem during the 2021–2022 school year. All of the participants indicated that the lack of student academic motivation was a problem in their classes. The second question in the survey asked participants to select a percentage range for students who showed signs of a lack of academic motivation for the 2021–2022 school year. The results revealed that 2% of the participants believed 0–20% of their students displayed signs of low academic motivation.

However, 29.4% of the participants indicated that students experienced low academic motivation for each of the ranges of 21–40%, 41–60%, and 61–80%. Finally, 8.8% of the participants indicated that 81–100% of their students exhibited low academic motivation. The survey results confirmed that many students exhibited behaviors that indicated a lack of motivation to turn in assignments or improve their grades by making corrections, which had a negative impact on student achievement.

School ended abruptly in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following 2020–2021 school year, students attended hybrid school, two days in-person and three days online, changing how students completed and turned in assignments based on access to technology at home. The COVID-19 crisis exposed students' needs for food, housing, medical care, physical safety, emotional support, and academic support (Berry, 2020). The return to fulltime in-person learning for the 2021–2022 school year, however, revealed a change in the climate at Brighton Middle School. Teachers and students experienced stressful challenges related to adding technology, new administrators, and changing expectations. Many students struggled to complete assignments, achieve academically, or attend school regularly after returning to in-person learning five days a week (R. A. Willey, personal communication, March 22, 2022). Teachers and administrators noticed a rise in behavioral problems, including disrespectful behavior, property destruction, and violence (R. A. Willey, personal communication, March 22, 2022). In response, teachers and administrators offered struggling students opportunities to turn in work late or redo low-scoring work. Students had access to free tutoring, and some had the opportunity to attend Cardinal Club after school, where they could obtain extra help with academic skills, opportunities for peer interaction, and an afternoon meal.

Despite all these opportunities, many students did not take full advantage of the available academic support. The administrators and the school social worker reached out to parents to secure their help with addressing truancy and behavioral problems. Furthermore, the administrators also worked to support teachers by providing technology training, talking to parents, and handling discipline problems. Increased administrative support was shown to lead to decreased stress for teachers, increased satisfaction in their jobs, quality instruction, and student achievement (Aldosiry, 2020). The administrators were visibly present throughout the school day and tried to make personal connections with students while enforcing school rules. Barksdale et al. (2021) argued that middle school students are more likely to succeed in a school climate that includes positive social interaction with peers, strong student–teacher relationships, access to materials, an organized physical environment, established rules and procedures, and a safe learning environment where students are respectful and kind. However, despite all the efforts to create a positive school climate where students felt connected and motivated to succeed, many students refused to accept the help offered to them or make an effort toward academic progress, resulting in referrals to summer school. Principal Alan Willey reported that 135 students were required to attend summer school in June of 2022 due to truancies that totaled more than 10% of the school year and low academic achievement in two or more core subjects.

Significance of the Research

By improving the practice of motivating students at Brighton Middle School, increased job satisfaction for teachers, academic progress for students, and fewer office referrals for administrators to resolve might be observed. All stakeholders, including students, teachers, and administrators in the school community, may benefit from research on ways to improve student motivation. With increased academic motivation, students may improve their grades and

strengthen their relationships at school. Middle school students' lack of motivation and engagement are known barriers to academic achievement (Alley, 2019). Several studies have reported that students who are motivated to learn to experience academic growth and an increased connection to the school culture (Barksdale et al., 2021; Umarji et al., 2021). Positive student–teacher relationships are also essential to fostering student motivation and increased learner autonomy (Alley, 2019; Scales et al., 2020a). When students are engaged in the learning process, they make academic gains, which directly impact teachers' level of effectiveness scores and lead to job retention and increased job satisfaction. Teachers may benefit from increased student motivation in the form of increased student participation, stronger student–teacher relationships, a healthier classroom climate, and greater academic achievement for students. Teachers can create learning environments that promote school connection and student autonomy by giving students choices, developing strong student–teacher relationships, and fostering peer relationships through partner and group work (Alley, 2019). A positive school climate and strong student–teacher relationships promote students' academic motivation and social development, higher grade point averages, and the professional performance of educators (Mousena & Raptis, 2021; Sethi & Scales, 2020). The principal also plays a key role in creating positive academic outcomes for students and positive work environments for teachers (Capp et al., 2021). Administrators may benefit from improved student motivation in the form of student achievement, decreased truancy problems, declining discipline referrals, teachers who are content and actively engaged with the mission of the school, and a positive school climate for all stakeholders (Aldosiry, 2020). Improving the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School may benefit all stakeholders in the form of a more positive school

climate, increased student engagement and academic growth, and fewer office referrals because students who are motivated to learn will engage in the learning process.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The first data collection approach used was semi-structured interviews with seven teachers at Brighton Middle School. The second data collection approach employed a survey of all students at Brighton Middle School who received parental consent to participate. The survey was administered using Google Forms, a web-based platform. The third data collection approach used a focus group with three school administrators, one school counselor, and one schoolwide instructional facilitator at Brighton Middle School.

Central Research Question

How can the practice of motivating students academically be improved at Brighton Middle School in Brighton, Tennessee?

Definitions

1. Academic motivation – "internal (personal) processes that manifest themselves overtly in goal-directed actions" (Jansen et al., 2022, p. 2)

2. Activity-based learning (ABL) – "a setup where students actively participate in the learning experience rather than sit as passive listeners" (Anwar, 2019, p. 155).

3. Amotivation – "a lack of motivation for performing a task" (Usán et al., 2019, p. 878).

4. Autonomous motivation – "the motivation that individuals experience when they have volition and free choice" (Feng et al., 2019, p. 3).

5. Developmental relationships – "close connections through which young people discover who they are (their identity), cultivate abilities to shape their own lives (agency), and

   engage with and contribute to the world around them (contributions and connections to community)" (Scales et al., 2020a, p. 502).

6. Extrinsic motivation – "performance of an activity because it leads to external rewards (e.g., status, approval, or passing grades)" (Deci, 1972, p. 113).

7. Intrinsic motivation – "self-initiated task engagement with no rewards beyond one's engagement with the task itself" (Deci, 1972, p. 5).

8. Motivation – "a set of interrelated desires, goals, needs, values, and emotions that explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behavior" (Scales et al., 2020b, p. 647).

9. Relatedness – "the universal desire people have to interact with, be connected to, and care for each other" (Alley, 2019, p. 8).

10. School climate – "the quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures" (Mousena & Raptis, 2021, p. 99).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presented the Organizational Profile, an Introduction to the Problem, the Significance of the Research, the Purpose Statement, the Central Research Question, and Definitions for this Research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presents the Narrative Review, Theoretical Framework, and Summary.

Narrative Review

The narrative review analyzes the literature pertaining to motivation and its impact in the particular educational setting of this research, including information regarding the history of student motivation, types of motivation, declines in student motivation, and factors that impact student motivation.

History of Motivation

Historically, motivation has been a valuable topic of interest for individuals in the fields of parenting, healthcare, technology, psychotherapy, organizations, and education (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Motivation can be described as the study of what makes individuals behave as they do or what drives individuals to act (Graham, 2020). Educators are especially interested in motivation as it relates to why students may or may not perform well on academic tasks, engage in the learning process, and participate in the school community. The transition from elementary to middle school can be very challenging for some students. Although research has found a trend of declining motivation as students transition from elementary school to secondary school, no study has identified the magnitude of such a decline (Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Students experience many changes as they transition to middle school, including a different student population,

switching classes, and an expectation for students to be more mature. Teachers in middle school do not have reward systems based on moving a clip or staying on green; students are expected to follow the rules and do their work. There has been some debate over whether or not external rewards are appropriate in the school settings. Research has suggested that external-control systems should not be used to enhance intrinsic motivation; instead, structuring interpersonal, engaging, and rewarding activities can lead to the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972). The impact of employing external rewards depends on the students' needs and the value that the students place on the reward. Teachers and administrators must have a clear understanding of what motivates their students so that they can create an environment that fosters students' academic motivation and achievement.

Types of Motivation

Many different types of motivation have been studied throughout the years, with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation being the most common types found in the literature. Motivation research distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, which refers to a desire to perform a task for its own sake, and extrinsic motivation, which relies on contingent external rewards (Toste et al., 2020). Other motivation constructs found in the literature include amotivation, autonomous motivation, academic motivation, and domain-specific motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is a complex and important construct that contributes to increased academic performance, well-being, and psychosocial functioning (Berki & Tarjanyi, 2022). A review of the literature reveals that different terms, such as intrinsic value, interest, and flow, have been used to describe the construct of intrinsic motivation (Koneka, 2020; Scherrer &

Preckel, 2019). Intrinsic motivation happens when individuals participate in an activity because they are inherently interested and enjoy participating in the activity (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated participate in activities because of the satisfaction, interest, perceived challenge, or enjoyment they gain from participating in those activities; in other words, they want to perform a task for its own sake (Toste et al., 2020; Usán, et al., 2019). Students who are intrinsically motivated want to explore topics of interest and actively engage in the learning environment. Intrinsically motivated students are inherently interested in a task and persistent in completing it; they are rewarded with the excitement or enjoyment they experience when performing a task or learning new skills or information (Conradty & Bogner, 2022). Students are more likely to be intrinsically motivated when they feel autonomous in decision-making and self-determination (Krou et al., 2021). According to self-determination theory (SDT), the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met for individuals to experience intrinsic motivation (Morris` & Barton, 2022). Autonomy refers to a sense of control, competence refers to a sense of ability, and relatedness refers to relationships with others (Morris & Barton, 2022). Educators want their students to be intrinsically motivated so that they are excited about learning, ask questions, and persist when working on challenging academic tasks.

Teachers can significantly impact students' academic motivation through how they establish the classroom environment, relate to the students, present academic material, and structure learning activities. Intrinsic motivation in students can be promoted by providing inspiration for the topic, creating real-world learning experiences, and offering choices while maintaining academic rigor (Mathewson, 2019; Nevo & Vaknin-Nusbaum, 2020). Students who are inspired to learn are intrinsically motivated to put forth an effort and embrace challenging

tasks as they are interested in the subject and thus gain a deeper understanding of the learning target (Mathewson, 2019). Mathewson highlighted school networks that focused on developing students' intrinsic motivation by offering real-world, hands-on problem-solving experiences that required sustained effort. Teachers can help students gain intrinsic motivation by providing learning activities where students can be successful, in turn, motivating students to seek future challenges in the same domain (Kotaman & Aslan, 2020). Furthermore, teacher feedback was also correlated with student motivation; positive teacher feedback correlated with increasing intrinsic motivation, and negative teacher feedback correlated with a decrease in intrinsic motivation (Fong et al., 2019). While having intrinsically motivated students is desirable, teachers must recognize students who do not have intrinsic motivation and work to discover how to motivate all students. Accordingly, teachers should take a proactive approach to creating a positive learning environment and engaging lessons that can pique student interest and foster intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic Motivation

Much like intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is a complex construct that teachers and administrators should understand so that external rewards can effectively be used to increase students' academic motivation. Individuals who are extrinsically motivated complete tasks to earn external rewards and view tasks as a means to an end (Koenka et al., 2021). When an individual's desire to work or participate in activities hinges on consequences or rewards such as praise, gifts, status, monetary gain, approval, or a passing grade, the person is said to be extrinsically motivated (Jansen et al., 2022; Toste et al., 2020). In the educational setting, teachers are the authority figures who use tangible rewards to foster extrinsic motivation

(Kotaman & Aslan, 2020). Candy, small toys, or time for preferred tasks are a few examples of extrinsic rewards that teachers offer students in return for strong academic performance.

Researchers have identified multiple levels of extrinsic motivation that lead to internalized motivation, greater autonomy, and increased task persistence and performance (Lai et al., 2019). External regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation are the four levels of extrinsic motivation established by SDT, according to which regulation refers to an attempt to control outcomes through the use of extrinsic rewards (Lai et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The continuum of behavioral regulations establishes why and how individuals internalize external controls. In the first level, external regulation, the external environment shapes an individual's behavior and constitutes a controlled and non-autonomous motivation (Lai et al., 2019, Ryan & Deci, 2020). Introjected regulation is the next level of extrinsic motivation in which an individual starts to internalize extrinsic motives because they see a positive psychological outcome associated with ego-enhancing rewards (Lai et al., 2019). With introjected regulation, individual performance is driven by the internal rewards of feelings of success or a boost to the ego and by a desire to avoid feelings of guilt, blame, shame, or failure (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Usán et al., 2019). Next, identified regulation is where individuals choose to participate in a task because they consider it suitable or important, thus allowing them to receive a desired autonomous outcome (Lai et al., 2019; Usán et al., 2019). The most self-determined or autonomous form of regulation of behavior is integrated regulation, in which the individual's behaviors align with their life goals and values (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Ulstad et al., 2019). While integrated regulation of behavior mirrors intrinsic motivation, the distinction lies in interest; intrinsic motivation only occurs when an individual is inherently interested in the activity. The levels of identified and integrated motivation are based on the value or worth an

individual places on a task (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students who value a task take a more autonomous approach to learning and working toward completing it.

In many schools, using tangible, external rewards, such as extra privileges, and verbal rewards, such as praise, to motivate students is a common practice. There has been much debate as to whether or not teachers should use extrinsic rewards to motivate students as punishment and reward systems can create a controlling classroom environment (Alley, 2019). Miele and Scholer (2018) determined that extrinsically motivated students performed worse than intrinsically motivated peers on a task that required complex or flexible processing. In contrast, Vu et al. (2022) posited that extrinsic rewards and parental or teacher requirements tied to achievement may alter the value a student attributes to academic learning. A fine line exists between controlling students' behaviors and allowing them to make choices within the learning environment. Parents and teachers who are attentive to students' individual needs can determine which rewards are motivating, thereby allowing them to use extrinsic rewards in a noncontrolling manner. Some autonomy-supportive teaching strategies that foster motivation include offering students choices, the freedom to work at their own pace, and options for how assignments are completed (Patall et al., 2019). Students who are given the opportunity to develop a sense of control over their learning can move toward the identified and integrated levels of extrinsic motivation that are set forth in the SDT.

Amotivation

Amotivation can be described as an absence of motivation to perform a task (Usán et al., 2019). Students who exhibit amotivated behavior may express themselves with disruptive behavior and anger, neglecting to connect outcomes to their actions (Conradty & Bogner, 2022; Usán et al., 2019). When a student exhibits unacceptable behaviors, teachers should question

what is causing the problem. Amotivated individuals do not value learning activities and may perceive themselves as incompetent or unable to perform the given tasks (Usán et al., 2019). If a student does not engage in the learning environment, teachers must reflect on the reasons for this lack of participation, seeking to evaluate why the student exhibits behavioral problems, seems angry, or refuses to participate. Such investigation can inform the teacher of the root problem, which is the starting point for enhancing students' academic motivation.

Autonomous Motivation

Autonomous motivation occurs when an individual freely chooses to participate in a task (Feng et al., 2019). When students can regulate their learning by making choices that pertain to an interesting task, they develop a sense of control over their learning, leading to increased ability beliefs, student engagement, and learning. As students internalize motivation, it becomes part of their identity (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomous motivation positively influences cognitive self-regulation, student engagement, and quality of learning (Manganelli et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2019). Parents play an important role in helping students develop autonomous motivation. Perceived parental support positively affects student autonomous motivation, increasing effort to complete homework (Feng et al., 2019). Those who feel a sense of autonomy are empowered to take control of their learning by making choices based on their interests and goals. Teachers can look to parents to gain insight into cultural beliefs and home environments, creating a home–school connection and building strong parent–teacher relationships.

Middle school is a time when students try to find their places socially and start to think about their future goals and aspirations. Becoming more independent and responsible can be a difficult part of the transition, and teachers can help their students during this time. Autonomy-supportive teachers pay attention to their students' need for autonomous motivation instead of

focusing on a grade (Ulstad et al., 2019). According to Patall and Zambrano (2019), "autonomy support recognizes that students develop best when their behavior is volitional, and its underlying reasons feel fully self-congruent and guided by their own interests, values, and goals" (p. 116). Teachers can influence autonomous motivation by creating meaningful and relevant lessons that hold students' attention (Bolkan & Griffin, 2018). In the classroom teachers can use autonomy-supportive strategies such as competence scaffolding and feedback approaches (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Ryan and Deci (2020) cited teaching strategies that were positively associated with students' autonomous motivation: listening to students, allowing students to speak, giving students adequate time to complete assignments, acknowledging improvement and mastery, encouraging effort, giving hints when students are struggling with an assignment, responding to students' questions and comments, and acknowledging students' perspectives. Furthermore, research has suggested that autonomously motivated students are more likely to attempt challenging tasks, put forth a greater effort, and exhibit more persistence and concentration on learning tasks, leading to better grades (Ulstad et al., 2019). Students who are exposed to teachers with a stimulating teaching style are more likely to pay attention and develop autonomous motivation than those who are not exposed to autonomy-supportive teachers (Bolkan & Griffin, 2018). A teacher who is determined to increase students' autonomous motivation considers the students' cultural backgrounds, family support systems, and interests when creating engaging lessons that offer choice and flexibility.

Academic Motivation

One of the most significant challenges for educators is understanding why some students are motivated to perform well and persist when presented with academic challenges, while others perform poorly and do not actively engage when presented with academic challenges (Hattie et

al., 2020; Koenka, 2020). Academic motivation involves internal processing on a personal level that results in goal-directed actions (Jansen et al., 2022). Academically motivated students want to do well in school. They are more likely to complete and turn in assignments, participate in learning activities, ask questions, and correct their assignments to improve their scores. One factor that affects students' academic motivation is having a sense of belonging, which refers to the degree to which students feel supported, accepted, and respected within the school climate (Korpershoek et al., 2020). Ultimately, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the latter of which includes identified and introjected regulation, are the building blocks of academic motivation (Lai et al., 2019). Furthermore, Trigueros et al. (2020) found that academic motivation positively predicted student performance. Students who experience a positive school climate are more likely to be motivated to complete their assignments and participate in learning activities because their basic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competency are met at school.

Domain-Specific Motivation

Year after year, students are asked what their favorite subject is during the first few days of school. While the favorite subject question may be a general way to get to know the students, it can also be an indicator of intrinsic motivation for that domain. Much research on motivation in specific domains has been conducted. Students' interests, cultural beliefs, self-concept beliefs, student-teacher relationships, and parental support can all be motivational variables that impact domain-specific motivation. Students who are intrinsically motivated to pursue science are likely to earn better grades in science than in subjects that they may not find as interesting or enjoyable. Teachers may find it easier to build strong relationships with students who experience domain-specific motivation in the area that they teach (Prewett et al., 2019). Students' self-concepts also play a role in domain-specific motivation, while those who believe they are good at a subject and

deem the subject matter important are likely to experience less stress, less anxiety, and higher achievement in that domain (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, students can experience intrinsic motivation in a certain subject area but not in others. While an individual may be a strong math student who inherently enjoys solving problems algebraically, they may lack an interest in reading. Therefore, low motivation for reading can also impact motivation in subjects such as science and social studies because they require students to read and glean information from texts.

Many external factors impact student motivation in physical education (PE) classes. Some students may be embarrassed to dress out for class or may have physical challenges that impede their physical activity. In contrast, students who are confident in their ability to perform physical tasks enjoy PE and say that it is their favorite class because it is fun. Berki and Tarjanyi (2022) found that students had increased motivation in PE class when the class focused on learning and individual improvement. Students who embraced the underlying value of PE exhibited identified regulation, a stage of external motivation, while those who exhibited self-determined behaviors and integrated regulation saw PE as related to their life goals and values (Ulstad et al., 2019). Additionally, Vasconcellos et al. (2020) reported that the students who were most likely to have a positive experience in PE class were autonomously motivated, while those who had negative experiences were amotivated. Ultimately, physical activity was related to enhanced cognitive function, including memory and attention, and when integrated with academic subjects, positively impacted academic motivation and achievement (Berki & Tarjanyi, 2022). Knowing the impact of physical activity on cognitive functioning, teachers can integrate it into their daily lessons as a way to motivate those students who are motivated by movement.

Students' reading motivation is influenced by many factors, such as the learning environment, teacher and peer relationships, and students' feelings of self-efficacy (Neugebauer

& Fujimoto, 2020). Research has suggested that initial positive reading experiences positively impact future learning, while early experiences of reading failure negatively impact subsequent learning, directly affecting students' motivation to read (Hebbecker et al., 2019). While some students participate in reading activities for external reasons such as grades or tangible rewards, Nevo and Vaknin-Nusbaum (2020) proposed that intrinsic motivation is vital to reading engagement. Students' reading motivation increases as they become more comfortable reading aloud and discussing what they have read. Teachers can help increase student motivation for reading by assigning texts that are relevant to the students' prior learning and experiences, allowing students to choose their reading material, and integrating collaborative reading tasks into instruction. Collaborative reading tasks may include partner reading, group discussions, and learning tasks that require further exploration of the reading material. Providing a choice of reading materials gives students a sense of control over their own learning and increases the likelihood that they read for enjoyment. Finding a balance between mandatory reading and choice reading materials can be an easy way for educators to promote reading in and outside of the classroom. Students reading motivation is important because all subjects, including math, require students to read and comprehend the text.

While some students love math and enjoy working with numbers, others experience anxiety or a low self-concept regarding their math abilities, impacting their motivation in math class. Math is a part of everyday life, and many people need math skills to be successful in their careers. Feng et al. (2019) suggested that parental support directly impacts students' math homework efforts, as parents are often a motivating factor in whether students completed math assignments. Kotaman and Aslan (2020) found that one quarter of the students in their study were intrinsically motivated to improve in mathematics because they wanted to attain higher

goals such as becoming a doctor. Math teachers can make a difference in how their students feel about the subject by encouraging their students, setting goals, demonstrating multiple ways to solve problems, allowing the students to choose how to solve problems, establishing a safe classroom environment, and developing strong student–teacher relationships. Student domain specific motivation in math can also impact other subjects, like science, because students are required to do math when studying some science concepts.

Domain-specific motivation in science has some similarities to the subjects of math and reading. In the same way as with math and reading, negative experiences such as low grades and negative feedback have a negative impact on student confidence and motivation (Hebbecker et al., 2019; Usher et al., 2019). Gender self-concept may also play a role in students' ability beliefs about a certain subject. In a previous study, girls reported higher rates of failure in math and science than boys (Usher et al, 2019). Science is a male dominated field of education and work, and some girls may be intimidated and lack confidence in their ability to achieve in the field of science. Evans et al. (2018) cited teacher support as one way to counteract negative attitudes and self-efficacy beliefs in the areas of math and science. Teachers can help students change their perceptions of failure in math and science by talking about opportunities for growth and learning when students find their mistakes and make adjustments or corrections (Usher et al., 2019). Students in the science classroom are more likely to be motivated when they participate in hands-on learning activities, are included in a collaborative learning community, and are comfortable taking academic risks (Marchand et al., 2021). No matter which domain is intrinsically motivating to a student, teachers can create a learning environment that fosters a strong community, collaboration, academic growth, and achievement.

Decline in Motivation

Studies have demonstrated that many students experience a decline in motivation as they transition from elementary school to middle school, thus resulting in a decline in students' academic performance (Burnes et al., 2019). This decline in student motivation has led educational researchers to search for instructional strategies and interventions that enhance and maintain student motivation (Alley, 2019; Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Although research has indicated an almost universal decline in student motivation as they transition to middle school, Scales et al. (2020a), however, posited that such a decline is not inevitable and can be reversed through by strengthening developmental relationships, especially student–teacher relationships.

Reasons for Decline in Motivation

The transition from elementary school to middle school can be especially difficult for some children because they are experiencing changes in many aspects of their lives. Psychological, physiological, social, and environmental risk factors have been found to contribute to declines in motivation (Scales et al., 2020a). Shubert et al. (2020) suggested that the transition from elementary school to middle school is not the problem; instead, a mismatch between students' developmental needs and the learning environment can cause of a decline in motivation, with diminished teacher support contributing to declines in student academic perseverance. Some students experience feelings that are associated with a decline in motivation, including sadness, tiredness, temptation, purposelessness, boredom, and hopelessness (Miele & Scholer, 2018). Adolescence is marked by significant developmental changes and social challenges for students as they attempt to find their place within the school community, exert their independence, and develop meaningful relationships (Scales et al., 2020a). Furthermore, student achievement is undermined when schools do not foster intrinsic motivation through need-

supportive learning (Ryan & Deci, 2019). While all students must cope with changes that are a natural part of growing up and advancing through the educational system, some students have additional stress related to parents' divorce, the death of a loved one, or other traumatic experiences. If teachers want to combat the decline in motivation during times of transition, they must be quick to develop strong student–teacher relationships and home–school connections.

Ways to Combat a Decline in Motivation

Researchers have investigated ways to mitigate the impact of the well-documented decline in student motivation. Kiuru et al. (2020) posited that students who have strong relationships with their parents before the transition to middle school experienced less difficulty with the change, noting higher school satisfaction and academic achievement. Educators can support students by reaching out to parents to establish a home–school connection with a simple phone call or a note with an encouraging word about the student. Adequate support and motivational strategies must be implemented in the classroom to combat a decline in motivation during the transition to middle school (Burnes et al., 2019). Teachers can improve adolescent student motivation by responding to students' developmental needs with expressions of care and support and by helping students develop a sense of agency as they make choices and participate in challenging and interesting tasks (Scales et al., 2020a). Personal best goal-setting, a growth-oriented mindset that is focused on personal growth instead of comparison with others, is another strategy that can support and promote student engagement over time (Burnes et al., 2019). Additionally, Scales et al. also found that strengthening student–teacher relationships is critical to improving and maintaining student motivation. Overall, taking a proactive approach to mitigating the impact of transitioning from elementary school to middle school on motivation can ease the transition for incoming middle school students.

Factors That Impact Student Motivation

Fostering academic motivation is important to teachers because they are held accountable for student success in the classroom (Hattie et al., 2020). Furthermore, students who develop the motivation to learn are more likely to be successful in the world after they graduate from school and pursue their career goals. Research has established a link between motivation and academic success, highlighting the importance of creating an environment where students enjoy and value learning (Koenka, 2020; Manganelli et al., 2019). Many factors impact student motivation, including students' psychological needs, school climate, parental involvement, factors that thwart student motivation, administrators' influence on student motivation, and teachers' impact on student motivation.

Psychological Needs

All people have inherent psychological needs that foster development and general wellbeing, as noted in the SDT (Ulstad et al., 2019). SDT proposes that individuals must have their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness met, or they will experience frustration and ill-being (Ryan & Deci, 2019; Ulstad et al., 2019). Both teachers and students need to have their basic psychological needs met for optimal performance in the academic setting.

Autonomy. Autonomy is the desire to have control over one's own life choices (Alley, 2019). It is volition and can be seen as both a product and a process (Kumar et al., 2018). When students have a sense of autonomy and feel empowered, autonomy is considered a product. When students strive to learn by cultivating critical thinking skills, autonomy is known as a process. As a mediator between perceived autonomy support and student engagement, autonomy is characterized by congruence among individuals' goals, motives, and values (Núñez & León,

2019; Ryan & Deci, 2019). A teacher's approach to autonomy support can impact motivation. In the classroom, students benefit from autonomy support that focuses on structuring a positive classroom environment and communicating with students in a way that conveys concern for their individual cultures, interests, goals, preferences, and values (Patall & Zambrano, 2019). Conversely, students suffer when their teachers are indifferent to students' need for autonomy, are controlling, and motivate students either through punishment and rewards or by invoking guilt and shame (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019; Patall & Zambrano, 2019). Teachers can create a classroom environment that encourages student autonomy by building relationships with students and their parents and learning about students' cultures, beliefs, and goals.

Teachers can enhance student motivation by implementing autonomous teaching strategies and building strong relationships within the educational community. Autonomous teaching strategies support students by considering their social, cognitive, cultural, and emotional needs, thereby creating a safe learning environment for all students (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Teachers who encourage students to take an autonomous approach to learning improve student engagement (Núñez & León, 2019). Some autonomy-supportive strategies include giving students choices, scaffolding, and providing meaningful feedback (Flunger et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2019). When students are given choices, they have the freedom to challenge themselves and choose activities that align with their interests, thereby eliminating boredom (Flunger et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers who offer meaningful corrective feedback allow students to learn from their mistakes, increasing their competence, relatedness, satisfaction, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2019, 2020). The days of rote memory, worksheets, and only using grades to determine achievement are gone. Teachers who want to motivate their students to be independent and responsible learners may consider autonomy-supportive teaching strategies that encourage

students to take control of their learning. Autonomously motivated students tend to be more engaged in the learning process and attain better academic results by using critical thinking skills and a wide range of cognitive strategies (Manganelli et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Competence. Competence refers to an individual's ability to effectively engage in their environment (Alley, 2019). Students' competence beliefs are of utmost importance to the learning process as they determine how they perceive their own ability to succeed (Li et al., 2021; Scherrer & Preckel, 2019). Academic self-efficacy and self-concept are two facets of competence that explain why students either engage or disengage during specific learning activities. While self-efficacy refers to how students feel about their ability to perform a task, self-concept involves how students perceive themselves in terms of self-confidence, self-worth, and self-acceptance, all of which are influenced by the perceptions of other significant individuals (Marsh et al., 2019; Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Shin and Bolkan found that when students were challenged to think critically and do their best, they put forth a greater effort, resulting in enhanced self-efficacy. Another study demonstrated that when students experienced perceived competence, their anxiety decreased and their interest in the subject increased (Li et al., 2021). For example, if students feel like they are good at math, they are likely to be more interested in it and exhibit increased motivation to perform math-related tasks.

Students experience competence when they feel effective and capable of completing challenging work (Holzer et al., 2021). Teachers can employ certain strategies to organize and facilitate activities that support competence in the classroom, thereby increasing students' perceptions of what they can accomplish (Holzer et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Teachers can create a structured classroom environment that offers intellectual challenges, positive feedback, and opportunities for growth, allowing students to master the subject matter and gain a sense of

success and growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Implementing competence-building strategies has been found to help students reduce anxiety and worry related to math (Li et al., 2021). Competence scaffolding is another strategy that enables students to increase their competence as they proceed through the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Scaffolding helps by providing helpful hints, questioning, or support as they work through a task. Teachers who implement scaffolding techniques help students build confidence as they answer questions to work through difficult tasks, increasing student competence, engagement, and motivation. Ultimately, students are more likely to perform well and enjoy learning when they feel competent.

Relatedness. Relatedness refers to an individual's desire to interact with others, be part of a community, and experience caring relationships within the community (Alley, 2019). Within educational settings, relatedness pertains to students' feelings of acceptance, value, support, and respect, as well as whether they are liked by the teacher and peers (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019; Holzer et al., 2021). While peers more significantly impact students' feelings of relatedness than teachers do, teachers can support relatedness by getting to know and understanding the students, demonstrating a caring attitude toward them, and spending time with them (Vasconcellos et al., 2020). For some students, who may lack adequate parental support, a teacher may be their only source of encouragement or support. Such students are more likely to work hard for a teacher who they believe cares for them. Students' sense of relatedness thus positively correlates with desirable academic achievement, growth, and motivation (Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Students who feel like they are part of the school community are more likely to be motivated to be active participants in the learning community, contributing to a positive school climate.

School Climate

A positive school climate is essential for student learning because it has been found to activate motivation and willingness to learn (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). School climate entails the overall atmosphere of school life that is created through established norms, values, interpersonal relationships, social context, and organizational structures. School climate is a multidimensional construct; administrators, teachers, and staff members take responsibility for creating a positive school climate that can be a protective influence for students, allowing students to experience high attendance rates, academic engagement, and success in the classroom (Capp et al., 2021; Daily et al., 2020). Overall, school climate is important because students and teachers want to be in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning and cooperation. While many studies focus on school climate and its impact on students' abilities to develop social skills, cultivate confidence, and achieve academic success, other studies have indicated that all parties involved in the school community are impacted by the school climate (Redding et al., 2019). The school climate influences teachers' expectations for their work, sense of efficacy, professional growth, and expectations for student potential (Capp et al., 2021). Capp et al. (2020) further identified school safety, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, and the institutional environment as the key factors representing school climate. These factors foster a school climate that impacts student development, future orientation, perseverance, and academic achievement (Capp et al., 2021; Shubert et al., 2020). School climate impacts students, teachers, and administrators, and all parties play a role in establishing the climate of a school.

School Safety. School safety is comprised of students' sense of emotional, social, and physical safety as it relates to the school climate (Rudasill et al., 2018). Safety is a term that describes whether students feel protected from violence, harassment, discrimination, bullying,

and illegal drug use in the school climate (Bottiani et al., 2020; Renick & Reich, 2021). Students should not have to worry about being hurt physically when they are at school. Furthermore, studies have shown that students experience less peer harassment in a school climate that embraces ethnic diversity and anti-bullying norms (Graham, 2020). Additionally, positive social relationships, academic engagement, and teacher care can all contribute to establishing a safe school climate where students and teachers do not waste valuable learning time focusing on problematic behaviors (Mousena & Raptis, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). Research has also demonstrated that students behave in socially constructive ways when they experience a safe school climate where respectful communication and behaviors are the norms, improving student motivation by promoting feelings of competence and autonomy (Alley, 2019). Establishing a safe classroom environment based on respectful communication is important because students should not have to fear rejection or being laughed at when they answer incorrectly. Failure is part of the learning process, and students should embrace failure as an opportunity to learn improve in the future. Studies have also revealed that students displayed higher academic engagement when working in a safe learning environment (Barksdale et al., 2021). School should thus be a safe place for all students to express themselves and engage in learning without fear of failure. A safe school environment promotes healthy relationships among students, teachers, and administrators.

Interpersonal Relationships. Developing strong relationships between students, parents, and school personnel is imperative for student motivation and engagement (Barksdale et al., 2021; Bottiani et al., 2020). As a social environment, school can be very lonely and isolating for individuals who are different or may find certain social contexts awkward. Social acceptance by peers and strong student–teacher relationships are essential for positive adolescent development and psychosocial functioning (Wang et al., 2020). Supportive parent and peer relationships have

also been found to strongly influence student engagement and motivation (Neugebauer &

Fujimoto, 2020). Additionally, student motivation can be impacted by perceptions of parents'

beliefs about the student's values and abilities (Jansen et al., 2022). Students' relationships with

their parents can influence how students feel about school and academic achievement.

Additionally, students' relationships with their peers and teachers can influence their academic

motivation, relatedness, and competency while at school. Relationships within the school setting

can foster students' strengths, effort, and engagement, directly correlating with their sense of

school belonging (Renick & Reich, 2021; Sethi & Scales, 2020). Moreover, students who

experience good interpersonal relationships within a positive school climate are less likely to

participate in inappropriate behaviors inside and outside the school setting (Daily et al., 2020).

The qualities of interpersonal relationships influence a sense of belonging, behaviors, and

engagement patterns that reflect the beliefs and values of the social group (Rudasill et al., 2018).

Many students may struggle to develop strong peer relationships, and teachers can help by giving

students the opportunity to get to know one another through partnering and cooperative learning

activities. In a study by Renick and Reich, students described interpersonal relationships with

teachers and other students as the best part of their school. When students enjoy being at school

and interacting with their peers and the teachers, they are less likely to have problems with

truancy and discipline. A positive school climate can offer students the support and security they

need to grow socially and academically.

Many students do not view their teachers as individuals with personal needs because they

only see and interact with them in the school setting. To address this issue, teachers can establish

classroom environments that foster positive relationships by telling personal stories, allowing

students time to get to know each other, and clearly establishing rules and expectations for

behavior (Barksdale et al., 2021). Teachers can also meet with students individually and use dialogue journals to influence and support student learning to build strong relationships with their students (Coombs, 2020). Dialogue journals are a method of communication where the student and teacher ask and answer questions in writing using a journal, eliminating embarrassment or frustration for the student. Furthermore, improving student–teacher relationships enhances students' motivation, engagement, and performance (Scales et al., 2020a). Ding and Rubie-Davies (2019) found that some teachers give preferential treatment to students for whom they have high expectations. However, students with low-expectation beliefs are inspired when their teachers exhibit courteous, caring, and encouraging behaviors equally to all their students. When teachers treat students equally, students reciprocate respectful attitudes, and those who are less willing to participate in the learning environment begin to collaborate with their peers and actively contribute to cooperative learning tasks (Ding & Rubie-Davies, 2019). Teachers can also consult parents and caregivers to gain insight into students' home lives, culture, values, and beliefs, in turn, helping teachers create a learning environment and lessons that integrate students' cultural identities (Kumar et al., 2018). Teachers show they care when they consider students' cultural beliefs and interests in planning daily lessons and activities.

Teaching and Learning. Student engagement, learning opportunities for both students and teachers, and teacher training are all facets of teaching and learning (Capp et al., 2020). Teaching refers to the quality of instruction that teachers provide, professional development opportunities, and professional collaboration (Rudasill et al., 2018). Teachers have a great deal of influence over the classroom environment, the implementation of lessons and learning tasks, and the social structure of the classroom. Ultimately, student experiences in the classroom hinge on the teacher's leadership style (Trigueros et al., 2020). Fong et al. (2019) reported that students

displayed increased autonomous motivation and homework effort when they received their teacher's support from the teacher. Karaman et al. (2020) revealed that middle school teachers were influential in helping students develop knowledge and self-efficacy skills. Students' performance may influence their perception of autonomous motivation, as academic success fosters autonomous motivation, and failure leads to a negative self-concept (Ulstad et al., 2019). As such, students are more likely to develop motivation when teachers create an environment where students enjoy and value learning (Koenka, 2020).

According to SDT, students experience higher motivation and academic engagement when teachers provide autonomy, cognitive, and emotional support (Feng et al., 2019). Parental support and teachers' attention to students' basic psychological needs also increases the likelihood of increased homework effort, autonomous motivation, and competency for middle school students (Feng et al., 2019; Vasconcellos et al., 2020). To give students a fulfilling educational experience, teachers must pay attention to students' interests and understand their goals and motivational patterns (Lazarides et al., 2019; Trigueros et al., 2020). Middle school students are more likely to report academic engagement when they perceive their teacher as highly supportive (Yu et al., 2018). Moreover, teaching practices that integrate motivational strategies, autonomy support, and structure within the classroom can help meet students' basic psychological needs and lead to a significant increase in student motivation (Aelterman et al., 2019; Karimi & Zade, 2019). Moreover, Bolkan and Griffin (2018) found that because autonomous motivation and sustained attention are independently related, teachers should strive to promote relevance and meaning to increase autonomous motivation and make lessons sufficiently interesting to hold students' attention. Technology, music, and interactive learning games can be used to draw students' attention and encourage participation in learning activities

and lessons. Teachers with an interactive teaching style can catch and hold student attention using task-oriented learning activities that allow students to interact with the learning environment (Castillo et al., 2020; Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Students enjoy interactive learning and are more likely to participate in learning activities and complete assignments when they can experience the learning using all of their senses.

Teachers can integrate motivational strategies into their pedagogy when they plan to meet their students' needs, especially when they accurately perceive individuals' needs (Karimi & Zade, 2019; Ulstad et al., 2019). When presenting a lesson, teachers must provide a clear structure for the lesson in the form of written directions, rubrics, and examples of work that clearly define the expectations (Alley, 2019). Teachers who are enthusiastic about their subject know their discipline, pay careful attention to how they present lessons, and ensure that the lessons directly correlate to the learning targets so that students gain a clear understanding of what is being taught (Saravi et al., 2020; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Implementing interventions that target learning and motivation paired with quality instructional strategies helps motivate students academically (Jansen et al., 2022). It is important for teachers to intentionally plan to integrate students interests, cultures, and learning styles when developing lessons. Autonomy-supportive teaching strategies incorporate student choice and nurture student interest while aligning with learning tasks (Aelterman et al., 2019). Ding and Rubie-Davies (2019) found that English language learners in China responded with positive self-belief and academic outcomes when the teacher integrated differentiated learning activities that offered opportunities for peer collaboration and corrective feedback. In contrast with traditional teaching strategies, activity-based learning is a student-centered instructional strategy that emphasizes student involvement, collaboration, problem-solving, self-direction, and critical thinking (Anwar, 2019).

A similar teaching strategy that can allow students to build relationships is cooperative learning, which has been found to help improve intrinsic motivation (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020). Cooperative learning allows students to work together to co-construct knowledge and complete tasks (Alley, 2019). In a study by Jeon (2021), teachers implemented instructional strategies that included stating the goal of the lesson, making the learning relevant, providing a collaborative learning environment, and scaffolding the tasks from simple to complex, all of which promoted student achievement. Teachers can support students' efforts to master a task by giving them sufficient time and opportunities to practice the skills being taught while encouraging them to collaborate and help one another (Olivier et al., 2019). Teachers can maximize student motivation by diversifying their teaching strategies to maintain students' attention and providing them with authentic, hands-on learning activities (Bolkan & Griffin, 2018; Usher et al., 2019). Students thrive in learning environments that embrace diversity, student autonomy, creativity, and collaboration. Students can learn from one another as they share their ideas and experiences in an active learning environment and are more likely to be motivated to learn when they are actively engaged in the learning process.

Institutional Environment. The institutional environment encompasses many facets such as the size of the buildings, outside areas, food in the cafeteria, access to technology, and connectedness to the school community (Renick & Reich, 2021; Shubert et al., 2020). Many theorists have agreed that student motivation is impacted by students' perceptions of the school climate (Hattie et al., 2020; Nolen, 2020). Furthermore, improving students' perceptions of the school climate can have a positive impact on student achievement and promote schoolwide success (Barksdale et al., 2021). Connectedness is a fundamental aspect of the institutional environment because students spend more time at school than they do at home. The social

environment at school is vital for students as it can either facilitate or thwart student motivation (Neugebauer & Fujimoto, 2020). A student's sense of belonging or connectedness to the school community directly impacts student motivation (Korpershoek et al., 2020). Students who do not feel a sense of belonging are likely to experience a lack of motivation because they may feel lonely, outcast, or awkward around their peers. Daily et al. (2020) concluded that students with positive perceptions of the school climate are more likely to enjoy school and become active participants in the learning process. Thus, teachers and administrators can influence the school climate by modeling acceptable behaviors, enforcing school rules, and exhibiting caring behaviors toward all students. Teachers can promote acceptance and tolerance in the overall school culture when they implement autonomy-supportive strategies that empower students to take control of their learning, thereby fostering student motivation (Patall & Zambrano, 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Discipline in the form of punitive consequences is associated with lower levels of positive school climate, student connectedness, peer relationships, and equity (Bottiani et al., 2020). Yu et al. (2018) suggested that administrators provide time for teachers and students to develop and enjoy meaningful interactions that allow teachers to learn about their students' backgrounds, interests, goals, and social-emotional dispositions.

Parental Involvement

Parents who are involved in their children's education constitute a key source of support for students and teachers. Parents who participate in the learning process cultivate motivation, engagement, and social and emotional well-being (Barger et al., 2019), contributing to academic achievement and a successful transition to adulthood (Sethi & Scales, 2020). While the transition to middle school often correlates with a decline in motivation for many students, supportive parent–child relationships that encourage student independence can mitigate the impact of this

transition and ensure students' general well-being (Alley, 2019; Kiuru et al., 2020). Additionally, research has suggested that parents' levels of education play a role in student engagement, and children whose parents have higher levels of education tend to display more positive engagement in school (Engin, 2020; Watt et al., 2019). O'Connor and Samuels (2021) identified potential reasons for lack of student achievement, including low socioeconomic status, parents' education level, and poor parenting. Some parents are simply not able to help their students on their educational journey because of their own lack of education. Educated parents are more likely to value education and encourage their children to place a high value on education. In contrast, some parents with low levels of education may also place a high value on education because they want their children to be more successful in life. Accordingly, teachers can partner with parents to encourage all students to value education.

Parental attitudes toward education directly impact student motivation. Students who have parents with a democratic parental attitude are likely to be academically motivated (Engin, 2020). Basharpoor et al. (2022) determined that parents with an authoritative parenting style gave their children a sense of support, which could then impact their children's ability to navigate the academic and emotional challenges in the school climate. Students who perceive parental support are more likely to strive for academic success. Controlling parents can diminish a student's self-regulatory capacity as they may rely on external rewards and punishment to regulate the child's behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Students who perceive their parents as controlling may be less likely to excel in academic settings.

Students feel parental support when parents do things such as attending parent–teacher conferences, discussing school activities, valuing students' opinions, providing opportunities to make independent choices, and avoiding the use of controlling language, all of which can

improve a student's sense of competence (Barger et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2019). Feng et al. suggested that parents' support with schoolwork can be positively or negatively associated with academic performance, depending on how students perceive the support. Some students become confused when their parents try to help with homework because their parents may perform the task differently than they were taught in class. Homework sessions can lead to arguments instead of just offering supportive help. While not all parents are equipped to implement autonomy-supportive parenting strategies, Mabbe et al. (2018) suggested that they can be taught to interact with their children in more autonomy-supportive ways to increase student motivation and psychological well-being. Although it can be difficult for many parents to allow their students to struggle, students may become more autonomous and competent as they learn through academic struggles.

Factors That Thwart Student Motivation

Teaching can be a stressful job, and, at times, teachers may unintentionally interact with students in a manner that thwarts student motivation. Teachers' attitudes, interactions, and teaching styles can discourage students from engaging in the learning process. When teachers emphasize good grades, achievement on high-stakes tests, and competition among students, they undermine their messages about learning for personal improvement and growth (Urdan & Kaplan, 2020). Neglecting to pay attention to students' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness may thwart student motivation and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students reported a lack of motivation when teachers had negative attitudes toward individual students' learning (Saravi et al., 2020). Ulstad et al. (2019) found that teachers treated their students differently based on their perceptions of student motivation; specifically, they were controlling with students who appeared to be unmotivated and gave students with perceived

motivation freedom from interruptions and more time to learn. When teacher control and discipline are emphasized, student–teacher relationships grow more distant and may begin to deteriorate, resulting in a decline in student engagement (Aelterman et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Teachers carry many burdens, including stress caused by a mandated curriculum, performance pressure, administrative requirements, and high-stakes tests; such stress can undermine student motivation and achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Some teachers are not prepared to teach, present material in a confusing manner, or lack effective teaching skills, leaving students to endure boring lessons void of real-world examples (Saravi et al., 2020, Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Teachers might also undermine students' engagement when they are intolerant of noise, unnecessarily deduct points on assignments, and assert their authority over the students (Saravi et al., 2020). The harsh reality is that students may be negatively impacted in classrooms on a daily basis if teachers have bad attitudes, neglect students' needs, and are not prepared to teach.

Administrators' Influence on Student Motivation

It is essential for administrators to establish a positive school climate for both teachers and students (Barksdale et al., 2021). While the principal is seen as the central manager of the school climate, such leadership does not always create a positive school climate (Capp et al., 2021; Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Influential leaders should have excellent communication skills, promote cooperation, display empathy for others, be realistic, and take a democratic approach to lead teachers, staff, and students; these can lead to a positive school climate (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Redding et al. (2019) found that some new teachers viewed their relationship with the principal as hierarchical, with the principal being above them, and felt a degree of distance and a lack of support. Administrators are responsible for completing classroom observations, which are

critical for establishing clear expectations for using high-quality instructional strategies and targeting professional development opportunities in which teachers can strengthen areas of weakness. When trying to establish a positive school climate, administrators should be aware of the varying degrees to which teachers are aligned with the leadership's vision; principals may need to earn the respect and mutual understanding of teachers who are not on board with the mission of the school (Capp et al., 2021). A principal's support is necessary for creating a positive school climate where teachers, students, and administrators have shared expectations for high-quality instruction and student behaviors (Redding et al., 2019). Teachers report that they feel supported by the administration when the principals enforce the school rules, give teachers time for collaboration, and offer encouragement. The principal sets the tone for the school climate, and all teachers must align with his mission, ensuring that the students have a model for collaboration, cooperation, and high expectations.

Teachers' Impact on Student Motivation

Teachers wield a great deal of control over student motivation because their actions can show a caring attitude, engage students' imagination, and build their self-confidence. Students' motivation is affected by teachers' behaviors and their peers' attitudes and behaviors in the classroom (Tas et al., 2019). Teachers play a critical role in establishing a positive classroom environment that inspires student engagement and motivation, leading to academic success (Debnam et al., 2021b; Jeon, 2021). When teachers consider students' developmental and learning needs, they can alleviate problematic behavior in the classroom by teaching students emotional regulation strategies, allowing for fewer distractions and higher levels of engagement in the learning process (Zhang et al., 2019). Teachers who inspire their students are able to

capture students' attention, and their students are more likely to be motivated to participate in engaging tasks, leading to a deeper understanding of the concepts they are studying (Mathewson, 2019). According to Trigueros et al. (2020), students who viewed their teacher as a transformational leader demonstrated high rates of participation in class activities and high levels of intrinsic motivation. Teachers can increase students' feelings of relatedness by making their students feel comfortable in the classroom, having a respectful attitude, including all students in conversations and activities, integrating student interests and cultures into lessons, and giving students choices.

Teacher Motivation. Teachers have the same basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as students do, and when their basic needs are met, they are better equipped to support their students (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Teachers' motivation and teaching abilities are impacted by the conditions they encounter each day (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Motivated teachers are excited about their students and the subjects they teach and can rise above a negative school climate to reach their students. Teachers must support their own autonomy and well-being so that they can encourage the development of the same in their students (Patall & Zambrano, 2019). Teachers who are enthusiastic about their subject inspire their students' enthusiasm, while teachers who have low enthusiasm for their subject often struggle to garner student attention and motivation (Lazarides et al., 2019). Furthermore, highly motivated teachers can plan and implement lessons consistently with an expectancy for student achievement (Engin, 2020). Engin also suggested that teacher motivation directly impacts pedagogy and academic achievement. Motivated teachers execute their educational duties efficiently, strive for excellence in their pedagogy, and have high expectations for both themselves and their students.

Student–Teacher Relationships. Positive student–teacher relationships significantly impact student motivation (Jansen et al., 2022). Castillo et al. (2020) asserted that teachers should lead by example by arriving promptly to class and respecting others. Students have reported that positive student–teacher relationships are built when teachers invest in their lives and notice their effort (Yu et al., 2018). Teachers' investment in their students' lives includes getting to know the students' cultural beliefs and goals and having the willingness to spend time with them. Noticing student effort involves teachers taking time to acknowledge students, answer questions, celebrate academic progress, and exhibit caring behavior. Communication is important for building trust, and students appreciate it when teachers listen to and respond to their concerns, are flexible with assignments and deadlines, and admit when they are wrong or apologize (Scales et al., 2020a). Teachers can strengthen the student–teacher relationship and promote students' self-efficacy by talking to students about their experiences and listening to students express their needs (Usher et al., 2019).

Students appreciate when their teachers exhibit genuine care (Yu et al., 2018). Student–teacher relationships are strengthened when teachers adopt caring behaviors such as treating students equitably, recognizing students based on their character traits, calling on students in class, giving students nicknames, and initiating informal conversations (Prewett et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2018). Scaffolding instruction, creating engaging lessons, showing respect to students, and providing feedback on academic work are additional ways that teachers can show that they care about their students (Prewett et al., 2019). Zhang et al. (2019) found that teachers' caring behaviors affect students' emotional and cognitive development. Zhang et al. found that students are less likely to exhibit problematic behaviors if they experience teacher care, and students reported feeling a sense of acceptance, closeness, and respect when teachers adopted caring

behaviors (Yu et al., 2018). Students experienced their teachers' care for them when they noticed and acknowledged that the students seemed to be having a bad day (Yu et al., 2018). For students who struggle in school, teachers can simply offer an encouraging word, a smile, and a pat on the back for a job well done. Students are more likely to work hard to please and hear a word of affirmation if they know their teachers care for them.

Teaching Practices That Promote Student Motivation. Some teaching practices require minimal effort but have a profound effect on student motivation, engagement, and achievement. Some examples of such practices include smiling, interacting with students, using students' names, interjecting humor into the school day, asking students about their interests, offering genuine encouragement and praise for effort, and talking about the students' futures (Scales et al., 2020b). In a study by Scales et al. (2020a), students reported higher academic motivation when teachers listened to them, established high expectations for their students, expected students to take responsibility for their behavior, viewed mistakes as learning opportunities, and established a relationship with them based on mutual respect. Ryan and Deci (2020) concurred with the importance of teachers' efforts to understand, acknowledge, and respond to students' perspectives while holding students accountable for their work. Students are more likely to make more effort in learning for a teacher whom they trust and with whom they have an established relationship (Scales et al., 2020a). Students know when a teacher genuinely cares for them. Thus, teachers whose behaviors send the message that they will not give up on their students promote student motivation through those behaviors (Scales et al., 2020a). Teachers can build strong relationships with their students and establish a positive classroom environment that encourages academic motivation when they have a positive attitude, high expectations, and respect for all people.

Teachers experience self-efficacy when they believe that they are capable of helping students learn (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). When teachers have a high level of self-efficacy, they are more likely to be persistent in creating challenging lessons and helping students achieve academic success (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Lazarides et al. (2019) reported that student motivation increased when teachers used clear and understandable explanations during instruction. Additionally, teachers foster intrinsic motivation when they exhibit autonomy-supportive strategies that provide students with a rationale for learning, meaningful choices, and tasks that reflect student interests and use informational language to help students understand lessons (Flunger et al., 2019). Another way that teachers promote student motivation and academic achievement is by implementing plans to accommodate students learning styles (Yu et al., 2018). When teachers feel like they are making a difference in their students' learning, they are more likely to use teaching strategies that help students become more autonomous and motivated to participate in the learning environment.

Classroom Environment. The classroom environment plays a critical role in student motivation, potentially influencing students' academic and psychological well-being (Wang et al., 2020). When teachers exhibit proactive behavior expectations, students have a higher sense of connectedness and report fewer instances of bullying at school (Bottiani et al., 2020). Students are more likely to exhibit problematic behaviors in the classroom when their teachers lack caring behaviors (Zhang et al., 2019). The main goal of implementing classroom management strategies is to help students set guidelines and goals for appropriate behavior in the learning community (Wang et al., 2020). Students should participate in establishing classroom rules and goals, giving them a sense of autonomy and belonging. Classroom instruction and classroom management techniques are directly related in that engaging instruction and learning activities reduce the need

for reactive management strategies (Gaias et al., 2019). Teachers' competency in classroom management techniques helps create a classroom environment that is generally free from disturbances caused by inappropriate behaviors. When a teacher can establish a classroom environment with a focus on internal motivation, achievable goals, and attainable challenges, students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and resilience (Trigueros et al., 2020). Students who are actively engaged in learning community are less likely to participate in distracting or inappropriate behaviors, thus contributing to a positive classroom environment.

Teacher Feedback. Feedback that is wise, practical, and non-judgmental can lead students to reflect on the learning process and increase student motivation (Conradty & Bogner, 2022; Graham, 2020). Students build self-efficacy when they receive feedback that highlights their progress in learning (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Some feedback techniques that promote student motivation include providing spontaneous offers of help, praising student success, offering sympathy, and refraining from blaming students for failure (Graham, 2020). However, teachers must be cautious to refrain from sending mixed messages when delivering praise; teacher praise could communicate that high effort can offset low ability or could constitute a protective factor for student motivation. Positive feedback boosts students' confidence in their ability to complete academic tasks, stimulates student interest and challenge-seeking behaviors, and increases students' competence satisfaction (Fong et al., 2019). Conversely, feedback that students perceive as controlling could reduce intrinsic motivation and students' sense of autonomy. The most helpful feedback for increasing motivation is informational feedback that emphasizes students' abilities and choices (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019). Teachers who offer written or verbal feedback that is authentic and specific can motivate

students to persist in challenging academic tasks and increase students' sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competency.

Although feedback is known to have a powerful influence on student behaviors and achievement, Fong et al. (2019) suggested that negative feedback could lead to more significant benefits for intrinsic motivation than positive feedback might. In contrast, Mabbe et al. (2018) found that negative feedback fosters feelings of competence frustration, leading to a decline in intrinsic motivation. If teachers know and understand their students' basic needs, they can better discern whether to use positive feedback, negative feedback, or a combination of both. Koenka et al. (2021) suggested that grades may hinder student motivation—even when accompanied by written comments—because students can become discouraged and focused on the score instead of the constructive feedback provided. While providing constructive feedback can be more time-consuming than simply setting a numerical grade, it can have a lasting impact on student motivation and effort. Therefore, teachers should provide written comments and opportunities to process and respond to the feedback instead of focusing on grades, as such feedback is more likely to increase students' intrinsic motivation and interest than grades might (Koenka et al., 2021). Teachers may want to consider offering written constructive feedback and offering students a chance to make corrections before assigning a numerical grade to papers, increasing students' opportunities to accomplish learning tasks.

Professional Development. Teacher training should encompass patterns of motivation, adolescents' needs and goals, and students' developmental needs (Lazarides et al., 2019; Vu et al., 2022). Training on autonomy-supportive strategies can change a teacher's instructional style to promote student motivation and self-regulatory strategies (Flunger et al., 2019). Teachers who embrace learning are likely to be open to professional development opportunities that focus on

implementing autonomy-supportive strategies that positively impact student motivation. Once trained, teachers are better equipped to provide instruction that enhances motivational attributes such as critical thinking skills, creativity, interest, and engagement (Anwer, 2019). Previous research has highlighted a need for teachers' professional development opportunities that emphasize developing student–teacher relationships to increase students' academic motivation (Jansen et al., 2022). Ding and Rubie-Davies (2019) suggested that interventions should be aimed at teaching educators to equally devote their attention to and provide opportunities and support for all students, allowing all students to achieve and eliminating preferential treatment. Additionally, Karimi and Zade (2019) suggested that teachers be trained in motivational strategies in the first years of their teaching careers. Teacher training programs should focus on motivational education pedagogy that effectively addresses the needs of heterogeneous groups of students (Lazarides et al., 2019). Administrators could ask teachers who excel at motivating their students to share their expertise in the areas of student feedback, classroom climate, or building meaningful relationships with students and parents during in-service.

Theoretical Framework

The current study applies the framework of SDT because it establishes how psychological needs impact autonomy and student academic motivation. The theoretical framework establishes a foundation that anchors every aspect of the study (Grant & Osalnoo, 2016). Self-determination theorists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan posited that individuals are naturally inclined to engage in activities that interest them (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Psychological well-being and development occur when individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Self-determination theorists have explored how individuals relate to one another and their environment because students' healthy development and sense of well-

being hinges on whether the students' psychological and social needs are met (Barrable &

Arvanitis, 2019). SDT includes three basic components that represent basic human needs and

impact human motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan

& Deci, 2020). Consistent with the SDT, students' psychological development and well-being

can only be achieved if these three basic psychological needs are met, and these basic needs are

fundamental for autonomous motivation and academic achievement (Holzer et al., 2021; Ryan &

Deci, 2020). Autonomy refers to an individual's need to experience a sense of willingness to act

(Vasconcellos et al., 2020). Perceived competence impacts students' motivation to engage in

academic tasks, while feelings of competence lead to behaviors that support future achievement

(Vu et al., 2022). Feng et al. (2019) reported that autonomy support strengthened students' sense

of control and competence. Relatedness refers to an individual's desire to feel connected to and

supported by significant others (Holzer et al., 2021). Students who feel supported and connected

to individuals in the learning environment are more likely to experience positive academic

outcomes (Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Student engagement and motivation may increase when

teachers and administrators are intentional about meeting students' basic psychological needs.

  In addition to addressing students' psychological needs, SDT highlights intrinsic

motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation as important factors that impact student

achievement, distinguishing between how students become engaged in the learning process

(Hebbecker et al., 2019; Koenka, 2020). Intrinsic motivation is the motivating force when a

student engages in an activity such as reading because they genuinely enjoy doing the task (Ryan

& Deci, 2020). Extrinsic motivation varies according to the degree of autonomous behavior—

from external regulation, introjected regulation, and identified regulation to integrated regulation

(Ulstad et al., 2019). External regulation, the least autonomous form of motivation, is seen when

students complete a task to receive contingent rewards or social recognition (Manganelli et al., 2019; Vasconcellos et al., 2020). Introjected regulation involves participating in activities to avoid feelings of shame or guilt or to protect one's self-worth. Students who exhibit identified regulation participate in an activity because of the activity's perceived personal importance or their desire to reach a personal goal (Manganelli et al., 2019). Integrated regulation is the most autonomous form of external motivation and is similar to intrinsic motivation, where students participate in activities for personal reasons, with the exception of inherent interest (Manganelli et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students possess natural motivational resources that prepare them to engage in the learning environment, and teachers can either support or discourage students from utilizing those natural motivational resources (Patall et al., 2019). Individuals can transition between various degrees of motivation depending on the subject matter, classroom environment, or relationships with peers or teachers. For example, a student may be intrinsically motivated to complete a language arts task because they enjoy the class; then, the same student may experience amotivation in social studies because they feel like the teacher picks on them in that class.

In educational settings, self-determination refers to a student's perceived control over the learning process; feelings of autonomy lead to positive academic outcomes (Conradty & Bogner, 2022). Autonomy-supportive teachers implement instructional strategies to increase intrinsic motivation by encouraging students' personal growth (Cheon et al., 2018). Teachers' communication and instructional styles can account for variations in student motivation. Teachers can foster students' engagement and intrinsic motivation, use external rewards to motivate students, and exhibit autonomy-supportive behaviors or controlling behaviors, all of which impact students' academic motivation (Núñez & León, 2019). Perceived teacher autonomy

support is crucial for meeting students' basic psychological needs and has been found to predict

student engagement (Koenka, 2020; Núñez & León, 2019). In school settings, some teachers

often rely on using positive reinforcement in the form of grades or awards and external pressure

or punishment to motivate students (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019). Instruction often aims to help

students develop internalized values and autonomous motivation related to the subject matter

(Vasconcellos et al., 2020). Feedback is one way teachers can foster intrinsic motivation; while

positive feedback enhances intrinsic motivation, negative feedback undermines intrinsic

motivation (Fong et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Ryan and Deci noted that students may view

grades as a controlling mechanism that diminishes autonomous motivation to learn. Additionally,

high-stakes testing may counteract supporting autonomous motivation and psychological

wellbeing (Anderman, 2020). Teachers can impact student motivation by implementing

autonomy-supportive strategies such as using non-controlling language, providing explanatory

rationales, noticing and interacting with students, acknowledging students' perspectives,

allowing students time for self-paced learning, and displaying patience (Shubert et al., 2020;

Ulstad et al., 2019). Teachers who implement autonomy-supportive strategies should be tolerant

of noise in the classroom because when students are allowed to collaborate, they exchange ideas

and build relationships as they work together to accomplish a common goal.

SDT provides a firm foundation for discovering ways to address the problem of low

student academic motivation. According to SDT, students whose basic needs of autonomy,

competence, and relatedness are satisfied experience enhanced academic motivation; thus, such

students are more likely to be engaged in the learning environment and invest more effort into

completing assignments (Basharpoor et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2019). Teachers can build strong

relationships with their students and employ teaching strategies that meet their students'

psychological and emotional needs, fostering academic engagement and growth. Furthermore, the competencies that students need in the twenty-first century require that the educational system help students develop critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and motivational skills to compete in the workforce (Conradty & Bogner, 2022). The framework of SDT provides valuable insight into students' needs, goals, and motivation styles, and such information can guide how teachers establish their classroom environment, communicate with their students, and design instruction that prepares students to become more autonomous and motivated to learn.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presented the Narrative Review and the Theoretical Framework.

Chapter Three: Procedures

Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presents the Interview Procedures, Survey Procedures, and Focus Group Procedures.

Interview Procedures

The first approach to collecting data in this study involved semi-structured interviews. Purposeful sampling was used to obtain participants so that they could purposefully inform the research problem. The interview questions used were grounded in literature and based on the research problem; they elicited information that was intended to lead to opportunities for clarification during the interview process (Claxton & Michael, 2021). In total, seven teachers, including two sixth grade teachers, two seventh grade teachers, two eighth grade teachers, and one special education teacher, were interviewed. All participants were selected based on their ability to contribute insights into improving practices for enhancing students' academic motivation at Brighton Middle School. Interviews were conducted on campus in a one-to-one, face-to-face format, and standard interview protocol was utilized during the interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2021). Each interview was scheduled at the participant's convenience during school hours from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Teachers were interviewed in their classrooms. Each interview was recorded and took approximately 20 to 40 minutes. Recordings were transcribed immediately after the interviews for data analysis.

Once the interviews were transcribed into script dialogue, the transcripts were reviewed, coded, and categorized into themes based on the participants' responses. Coding and categorization were appropriate data analysis methods for this study because they provided insight into recurring keywords, ideas, and beliefs about how to improve the practices for enhancing students' academic motivation (Claxton & Michael, 2021). This method also allowed for the creation of a table of codes, from which I determined what constituted an entry under a specific theme and what did not. Coding involved reading the transcript from each interview to identify the various themes represented throughout. To answer the central research question, data were collected qualitatively via 10 semi-structured interview questions. After participants provided their consent to participate in the study, the following 10 questions were utilized in the interviews (see Appendix C).

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the school climate at Brighton Middle School?

This question gave insight into how participants viewed the school climate at Brighton Middle School. It was important to understand participants' views on school climate because academic motivation develops from interpersonal relationships and social experiences associated with the school climate (Marchand et al., 2021).

2. How does working with peers impact student motivation?

This question aimed to determine how participants felt about students working with peers to achieve academic goals. Research has suggested that middle schools do not provide many opportunities for students to actively participate in learning, thus contributing to motivational decline for students (Marchand et al., 2021). Middle school students value working with peers,

building positive relationships with peers and teachers, and developing social norms for classroom behavior (Barksdale et al., 2021).

3. What do you think motivates students to achieve academically?

The purpose of this question was to gain insight into what factors teachers perceive as essential for increasing student motivation and academic achievement. Research has demonstrated that student–teacher relationships significantly impact student motivation (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Furthermore, research has shown that students appreciate teachers who tell personal stories, give them a fresh start with a clean slate each day, have high expectations, and embrace the future (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Anwer (2019) found that students are motivated to actively participate in learning activities when teachers implement activity-based learning strategies into daily lessons. According to the stage-environment fit theory, a match between students' developmental needs and the learning environment is essential for student motivation (Renick & Reich, 2021). Knowing what motivates students can help teachers evaluate their approach to classroom environment and instruction (Alley, 2019; Erentaité et al., 2022).

4. What do you think hinders student motivation?

This question helped me understand possible reasons why students were not motivated to achieve or participate in the school setting. Such information helped me explore ways to alleviate barriers to student motivation at Brighton Middle School. Four components of the school climate that impact student engagement and academic achievement include safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the institutional environment (Renick & Reich, 2021). Bullying, school violence, student supports, school rules, appropriate discipline, equity, and fairness all contribute to a student's sense of safety, which directly impacts student motivation (Erentaité et al., 2022; Renick & Reich, 2021).

5. What makes students feel like they belong at Brighton Middle School?

This question aimed to identify which aspects of Brighton Middle School cultivate school belonging, helping me determine additional ways to improve student academic motivation. School connectedness includes school attachment, bonding, engagement involvement, a sense of belonging, and perceived support and is built on mutually trusting and respectful relationships with peers and adults at school (Debnam et al., 2021b). Students who feel like they belong to the learning environment are more likely to have positive educational outcomes and lower rates of unhealthy or risky behaviors (Debnam et al., 2021b). Jansen et al. (2022) found that social variables such as a sense of belonging in school have a strong impact on academic motivation.

6. How does teacher behavior impact student motivation?

The purpose of this question was to determine the participants' views on how teachers can help or hinder student motivation. Studies have shown that teachers are among the most influential individuals in the school climate (Barksdale et al., 2021; Capp et al., 2021). Positive student–teacher relationships promote student motivation, academic achievement, and increased learner autonomy (Alley, 2019; Sethi & Scales, 2020). Research has demonstrated that students who perceive their teachers' care report feelings of belonging and motivation to engage in school (Umarji et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers can motivate students to learn by building positive student–teacher relationships and creating a safe learning environment where kindness and respect are practiced by all (Barksdale et al., 2021).

7. How can the principals at Brighton Middle School support students?

This question revealed participants' thoughts on specific ways the principals at Brighton Middle School could support students striving to make academic achievements. Prior research

has suggested that principals can promote a positive school climate by building trust between teachers and students while creating a shared vision for the school community (Capp et al., 2021). The principal sets the tone for the school climate for teachers and students (Mousena & Raptis, 2021; Capp et al., 2021). School leadership plays a vital role in managing the distribution of resources and cultivating relationships within the community (Rudasill et al., 2018). Mousena and Raptis identified the principal as "the central regulator of school climate" (p. 99), responsible for regulating relationships within the school and in all aspects of educational work.

8. How do students at Brighton Middle School take personal responsibility for their motivation to succeed academically?

This question aimed to determine participants' views regarding student autonomy and motivation to succeed in the school setting. Autonomy is based on students' need to be free from control and to have the opportunity to make choices based on personal values and goals (Flunger et al., 2019). SDT describes how positive student–teacher relationships help meet students' needs for autonomy, a sense of belonging, and competence, thus impacting students' ability to self-regulate and increasing their motivation to learn (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Research has shown that a school environment that supports autonomous learning and gives students choices and opportunities to revise or relearn is critical for increasing intrinsic motivation (Morris & Barton, 2022).

9. How does the climate at Brighton Middle School affect student motivation?

The purpose of this question was to gain information about specific ways participants believe that the school climate impacts student academic motivation. Studies have shown that a positive school climate can lead to positive school experiences, higher levels of student engagement, lower dropout rates, increased teacher retention, and academic achievement for

students (Capp et al., 2021; Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Daily et al. (2020) found that school climate was positively associated with school satisfaction. When students enjoy being at school, absenteeism is reduced, and students exhibit fewer discipline problems and increased confidence in their academic ability and achievement (Daily et al., 2020). Barksdale et al. (2021) indicated that students' perception of school climate directly impacts student motivation and achievement.

10. What other feedback or thoughts about ways to increase student motivation at Brighton Middle School could you add?

This final question allowed participants to express any other thoughts they had about ways to increase student motivation at Brighton Middle School. This question gave participants the opportunity to expand on the conversation and express any additional ideas related to student motivation that may not have been addressed during the previous questions posed in the interview.

Survey Procedures

The second approach to collecting data in this study was a survey. This approach investigated how students perceived student motivation and identified factors that contributed to student motivation at Brighton Middle School. To collect data, a closed-ended five-point Likert scale survey was administered electronically using Google Forms, a web-based platform. A quantitative survey was an appropriate data collection approach for this study because it required participants to make an answer choice that differentiated the degree of agreement or disagreement with the given prompt (Claxton & Michael, 2021).

A total of 174 students acquired written parental consent and participated in the survey (Appendix D). Purposeful sampling was utilized because all students were familiar with Brighton Middle School and could contribute valuable information about the research problem of

improving the practice of motivating students (Claxton & Michael, 2021). Once written parental consent was received, each participant's Cardinal Time teacher distributed the Google Forms survey. The Cardinal Time teachers received an email with a list of students who had parental consent to take the survey. The email included the link to the Google Form and instructions regarding how to complete the survey. The participants were given a timeframe of two days to complete the survey, and accommodations were made for students who needed more time. The results were analyzed by calculating the frequency of each number reported on the Likert scale on a question-by-question basis, as well as the average score reported by all participants for each question. The survey included three demographic questions and 11 prompts developed from a review of scholarly literature (see Appendix E).

Demographic Questions

Instructions: Choose one response for each question below.

1. What is your ethnicity?

    White

    African American

    Hispanic

    Native American/Pacific Islander

    Two or more ethnicities

    Other

2. What is your gender?

    Male

    Female

    Prefer not to answer

3. What is your grade level?
   Sixth grade

   Seventh grade

   Eighth grade

Survey Prompts

Instructions: Choose one response for each prompt below.

1. Students feel like they belong at Brighton Middle School.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This prompt was intended to determine the degree to which participants felt like students feel a sense of belonging at Brighton Middle School. Research has demonstrated that a sense of belonging is an important human motivational need and can influence student behavior, attitudes, and outcomes (Whiting, 2021). According to Whiting, a sense of belonging within schools is significantly associated with general school motivation, student effort, success expectancy, and value of schoolwork.

2. Brighton Middle School has a safe learning environment.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This prompt elicited the degree to which participants felt safe in the learning environment at Brighton Middle School. Students should feel safe when they are at school. They should not have to worry about school shootings, intruders, or bullying; they should not be afraid of failing in the academic setting. Physical, social, and emotional safety all impact the learning

environment (Rudasill et al., 2018). Research has suggested that student motivation is dependent on feelings of safety and connectedness to others in the learning environment (Patall et al., 2019).

3. Students at Brighton Middle School believe in their ability to achieve academically.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This prompt measured the degree to which participants thought that students at Brighton Middle School generally had confidence in their own ability to make academic achievements. Steinmayr et al. (2019) found that students' ability self-concept, hope for success, and fear of failure were motivational predictors of academic achievement, with ability self-concept being the most important.

4. Students at Brighton Middle School are motivated to complete daily assignments.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This prompt sought to measure the degree to which students at Brighton Middle School were motivated to complete daily assignments. When students are motivated to learn, their academic outcomes are more likely to improve. Students may complete academic tasks because they are intrinsically motivated to do so or because they are externally motivated by grades or some other type of reward (Koenka et al., 2021). Students' motivational values and expectancies are the two most influential factors that contribute to student achievement (Zee et al., 2021).

5. Students at Brighton Middle School enjoy meaningful relationships with their teachers.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The purpose of this prompt was to determine the degree to which participants believed students had meaningful student–teacher relationships. Extended attachment theory indicates that warm and conflict-free student–teacher relationships are necessary to promote student motivation for learning (Zee et al., 2021). Anwer (2019) posited that student–teacher interaction plays a crucial role in a student's motivation to learn. Various studies have suggested that student–teacher relationships are key factors in promoting academic achievement and student motivation (Koenka et al., 2021; Kotaman & Aslan, 2020).

6. All students have equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at Brighton Middle School.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This prompt sought to gain insight into whether participants agreed that all students had the opportunity to participate in activities offered by the school. Brighton Middle School offers an after-school club that was specifically formed for students who could benefit from a hot meal, academic support, opportunities for exploring career skills, and additional social time. Clubs and sports teams are also available to students at Brighton Middle School. Research has found that student-perceived school connectedness is a protective factor linked to increased academic success and decreased levels of risky adolescent behavior (Debnam et al., 2021b). Whiting (2021) highlighted that a sense of belonging is an important part of the human experience and is highly motivating to students.

7. Teachers at Brighton Middle School care about their students.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

The purpose of this prompt was to reveal the extent to which participants believed that teachers care about their students at Brighton Middle School. Perceived teacher care is a strong predictor of student motivation and self-efficacy (Anwer, 2019; Umarji et al., 2021). Caring teachers challenge their students to embrace difficult tasks and grow academically (Scales et al., 2020b). Furthermore, research has suggested that creating a caring classroom environment helps students feel safe, respected, and cared for, thus fostering the motivation to learn (Barksdale et al., 2021).

8. Teachers at Brighton Middle School give students the opportunity to work with peers in the academic setting.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Answers to this prompt indicated the degree to which students believed they were provided with opportunities to work with peers in academic settings. Students need social interaction, and activity-based learning allows students to work cooperatively to solve problems, express their ideas, and help one another throughout the learning process (Anwer, 2019). Peer relationships are instrumental in developing a student's perception of the school climate, which is directly related to motivation to learn and academic achievement (Sethi & Scales, 2020).

9. The after-school tutoring program benefits a large number of students who need extra help at Brighton Middle School.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

This prompt sought to determine the value placed on opportunities for students to obtain extra help with homework assignments or skill deficits. The data retrieved from this prompt

would help me determine the degree to which students have taken advantage of the opportunities for individualized extra help with academic tasks. Coombs (2020) noted that individualized instruction and attention make students feel valued and encouraged. Furthermore, teachers can bolster intrinsic motivation by providing meaningful feedback and correction on academic assignments (Jeon, 2021). As part of the after-school tutoring program, certified teachers are available to help students with homework and assignment corrections, and students have the opportunity to obtain individualized support in the after-school program.

10. Administrators at Brighton Middle School follow the schoolwide rules and consequences.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Data collected from this prompt revealed the degree to which participants felt students were held accountable for their actions. In the context of school climate, elements of school safety include school rules, appropriate discipline, and equity (Mousena & Raptis, 2021; Renick & Reich, 2021). Research has demonstrated that a positive school climate promotes motivation, academic achievement, and willingness to learn (Daily et al., 2020; Mousena & Raptis, 2021).

11. Brighton Middle School has a positive school climate.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Data retrieved from this prompt revealed participants' overall perception of the school climate at Brighton Middle School. School climate is a broad term that encompasses shared beliefs and values, relationships, safety, teaching and instruction, leadership, and the physical environment (Rudasill et al., 2018). A positive school climate diminishes the negative impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement (Barksdale et al., 2021). Characteristics of a

positive school climate include an active interest in student and teacher involvement, clear expectations for behavior, an absence of corporal punishment, and adults who are positive mentors (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Students who are engaged in the school culture are motivated to participate and learn, thus contributing to their success (Mousena & Raptis, 2021).

Focus Group Procedures

The third approach for collecting data in this study was a single-focus group consisting of the principal, two assistant principals, one school counselor, and the schoolwide instructional facilitator. This approach allowed for a series of established questions to be presented synchronously. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants due to their familiarity with the students at Brighton Middle School. Participants were able to contribute firsthand information about students' academic behavior and motivation as it related to the research problem of improving the practice of motivating students academically. All five participants engaged daily with the student body by handling discipline issues, truancy, and student problems; thus, they were a logical choice of participants for addressing the problem considered in this study. Conducting a focus group helped illustrate how administrators viewed student motivation, addressed reasons for lack of motivation, and revealed possible solutions to the problem of improving students' academic motivation at Brighton Middle School.

The focus group was conducted via an in-person meeting in the principal's office at Brighton Middle School. The meeting was recorded using a voice recorder, and I took notes about participants' facial expressions and body language during the focus group discussion based on my own observations (Claxton & Michael, 2021). The duration of the focus group meeting was approximately one hour. The focus group recording was transcribed for data analysis immediately after the focus group meeting.

Themes were then identified based on the transcripts from the focus group recording. Coding and categorization were used to analyze the data because these methods allowed for identifying keywords, phrases, and concepts that helped establish themes related to improving the practice of motivating students academically. A table of codes was created using the data collected from the focus group transcripts, helping to establish the themes found in the data. The coding process involved reading the focus group transcript to identify words with common meanings. Qualitative data were collected via eight semi-structured questions that were formulated to address the central research question—How can the practices for enhancing students' academic motivation be improved at Brighton Middle School in Brighton, Tennessee? After participants consented to participate in the study, the following eight questions were utilized (see Appendix F).

Focus Group Questions

1. What factors contribute to low student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

    The purpose of this question was to determine the specific factors that participants believed contribute to low student motivation at Brighton Middle School. Evidence from prior studies has suggested that students experience a decline in academic motivation as they transition from elementary school to middle school (Marchand et al., 2021; Scales et al., 2020b). How students engage with a learning task can be indicative of their level of motivation, which then corresponds to academic achievement (Wright et al., 2020). Research has suggested that many factors, including developmental relationships, competence, relatedness, learning environment, and self-efficacy, contribute to student motivation (Karaman et al., 2020; Nevo & Vaknin-Nusbaum, 2020). Information gleaned from the answers to this question gave me insight into what factors at Brighton Middle School contribute to low levels of student motivation.

2. How do administrators at Brighton Middle School promote student motivation?

This question aimed to determine what participants believed administrators' responsibilities in promoting student motivation were. Barksdale et al. (2021) noted that administrators are key players in establishing a vision for the school climate and have a responsibility to make sure that teachers and students subscribe to that vision. Principals can show support for teachers by encouraging them, allowing time for collaboration, and enforcing school rules (Redding et al., 2019). Perceived order, organization, school support, and teacher support are associated with academic achievement and motivation (Barksdale et al., 2021).

3. How do discipline policies affect student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

This question aimed to gain an understanding of how participants believed discipline policies impacted student motivation at Brighton Middle School. School rules and discipline are aspects of the school climate that impact student autonomy and developmental relationships (Renick & Reich, 2021). Bottiani et al. (2020) found that critical and punitive teacher practices are associated with less connectedness and equity, two aspects of the school climate that impact student motivation. Conversely, Saravi et al. (2020) found that fair and effective discipline is associated with a sense of belonging. Furthermore, research has also suggested that students who feel safe, respected, and cared for are more likely to be motivated learners (Barksdale, 2021).

4. What role do teachers play in motivating students at Brighton Middle School?

The answer to this question provided further context for regarding how participants believe teachers could motivate students. Teachers play a vital role in educating students and motivating them to learn (Anwer, 2019). Students who perceive their teachers as caring report higher levels of motivation (Umarji et al., 2021).

5. How can administrators support teachers as they work to motivate students to achieve

academically?

This question aimed to determine specific ways in which participants believed

administrators could support teachers in their effort to motivate students at Brighton Middle

School to improve academic achievement. According to Mousena and Raptis (2021), the

principal is the key manager of the school climate. Teachers who perceive a positive school

climate exhibit less burnout and higher job satisfaction (Debnam et al., 2021a). Professional

development opportunities are one way in which principals can support teachers, giving them the

opportunity to learn how to implement activity-based learning strategies that enhance the

learning process and give students the chance to develop peer relationships, critical thinking

skills, and creativity (Anwer 2019). Furthermore, professional development increases teachers'

confidence in their ability to effectively implement instructional strategies, which, in turn,

positively impacts student academic success and motivation (Cheon et al., 2018).

6. How do peer relationships impact student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

This question sought to determine the extent to which participants believed peer

relationships impact student motivation. Activity-based learning gives students the opportunity to

play an active role in the classroom, collaborate with peers, and develop positive peer

relationships, thus contributing to a positive learning environment and promoting student

motivation (Anwer, 2019).

7. How would you describe the school climate at Brighton Middle School?

This question aimed to establish how participants felt about the climate at Brighton

Middle School. The principal of a school plays a crucial role in regulating the school climate

(Mousena & Raptis, 2021; Rudasill et al., 2018). A leader who values communication and democratic principles can create a positive and productive school climate by developing good relationships with staff, building trust, and being an empathetic listener (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Furthermore, student perceptions of school climate are based on student–teacher and peer relationships, school safety, academic equity, school satisfaction, and school connection, all of which are related to academic performance (Daily et al., 2020). Research has suggested that motivation and willingness to learn are directly related to school climate (Mousena & Raptis 2021).

8. Would you like to contribute any additional information that will help solve the problem of low student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

The purpose of this question was to gain insight into any additional information participants could contribute to solving the problem of low student motivation at Brighton Middle School.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presented the Interview Procedures, Survey Procedures, and Focus Group Procedures.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presents the Interview Findings, Survey Findings, Focus Group Findings, and Discussion of the Findings.

Interview Findings

The first data collection approach used in this study was semi-structured interviews. Each participant answered 10 interview questions. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into enhancing students' academic motivation at Brighton Middle School from teachers' perspectives. All interviews were conducted face-to-face with seven teachers, including two sixth-grade teachers, two seventh-grade teachers, two eighth-grade teachers, and one special education teacher. Individual teachers were interviewed in their assigned classrooms during school hours between 7:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Participants were given a brief summary of the purpose of the study before each interview, and I received their verbal consent to conduct the interview before asking the interview questions. Each interview lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded and immediately transcribed for data analysis. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used.

Interview Descriptions of Participants

Teacher One is a special education teacher who has worked with students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. She is an English language arts interventionist who holds a master's degree in education. She has been teaching for 12 years with experience in general education and

special education classrooms. Her responsibilities include teaching small group intervention classes for English language arts and co-teaching in sixth-grade inclusion classes. She is also a math tutor for students who needed extra help. This participant was an important informant because of her experience in both general education and special education classrooms.

Teacher Two is a sixth-grade English language arts teacher. She has been teaching for 24 years. She holds a master's degree in administration. Teacher Two is known to be a very structured teacher who typically does not have discipline problems in her class. Her honesty and forthcoming answers lent valuable information to the study regarding school climate.

Teacher Three is an eighth-grade social studies teacher who has been teaching for 24 years. She has a master's degree and completed 30 additional hours of coursework in educational leadership. Teacher Three has experience working with students with special needs. She often teaches an inclusion class that includes students from the self-contained special education classroom and typical peers. Teacher Three has a reputation for holding all of her students to a very high academic standard. She is very structured and organized. Her experience with teaching inclusion classes and communicating with parents provides valuable insights into the study.

Teacher Four is a sixth-grade science teacher with a master's degree in administration. She has been teaching for 33 years and is known for being very structured and consistent. She arrives at school about an hour early and stays late each day. Her class is organized and quiet with clearly defined behavior expectations. She enjoys doing hands-on labs with her students. Teacher Four was able to offer insight into how she runs her classroom and what she expects from her students, adding information on ways to improve student motivation.

Teacher Five is an eighth-grade pre-algebra teacher who has taught in many different schools throughout the county. She holds a master's degree in administration and has been

teaching for 26 years. This teacher encourages her students to work with partners or small groups. Her classroom is busy and full of discussion and cooperative learning. Teacher Five's experience with creating a collaborative classroom environment gave valuable information about student motivation and work ethic.

Teacher Six is a seventh-grade English language arts teacher who has been teaching for 17 years. She holds a bachelor's degree in education. This teacher is known as a "fun" teacher. She was the leader of the homecoming committee and is very outspoken. Her classroom environment can be quiet and orderly, but she also gives her students opportunities to work with each other. Teacher Six's experience in the classroom provided important information about cooperative learning and student behavior.

Teacher Seven is a seventh-grade science teacher who has been teaching for 13 years. She held a master's degree in gifted education. She oversees the yearbook staff with students from sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. She is an avid fan of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books and uses character names from those books to organize groups in her classroom. This teacher is flexible and understanding, and her students work in small groups daily. She welcomes students with special needs and is quick to differentiate assignments. Because of her classroom management style and approach to instruction, she offered valuable information to the study.

Interview Results

Interviews were conducted with the seven teachers. All interviews were transcribed immediately after the interview took place. Relevant code words, phrases, and quotes from the interview transcriptions were noted as they related to the current study. Then, the codes were organized into themes based on their relation to the subject matter. Themes from the qualitative data are identified and reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Codes and Themes from Interview Data

Themes	Codes	Participants' Quotes
Home–School Connection	Parents	"If parents place an importance on education, then usually the students will try and rise to meet their parents' standards."
	Academics	"I think if the importance of education is emphasized at home, the child will do what's necessary to do their best in academics."
	Expectations	"The ones that are achieving academically, it comes from, I feel like two places. Either their parents have certain expectations, or they are completely intrinsically motivated."
	Home	"I think the biggest motivation, motivator, is what's expected in their home, what their parents expect of them."
Student Collaboration	Peers	"I've always been someone who feels that peer tutoring and peer interaction brings more understanding to a concept, conceptual understanding because they speak each other's language."
	Friends	"I think they feel safe, you know, being wrong around their friend, and then their friends help them along."
	Support	"They [students] like having the support of someone else to confirm their answers right or wrong."
	Partner	"I think it totally depends on which peers they partner up with. In some cases, they partner with someone who brings out the best in them, and that's a wonderful situation. But in other cases, they get together, whether it's through scheduling or picking their partners, on a project or whatever, the friends that they choose and the personalities that get together bring out the worst in each other, and that is not a good situation."
School Climate	Administrator Presence	"I wish they [principals] were more present. I mean, even in my room. I'm not ashamed of what I'm doing here. Come on in. I wish they were more present so that when they came in it wasn't so like, the principal is in here."

Staff Relationships	"From a teacher's point of view, I think we're a family, and we'll do anything for each other. But, when you are as close as some of us are, there's a lot of pettiness as well."
School Safety	"They're (the students) motivated to learn once they feel safe and secure in the environment."
Positive Student Recognition	"I love that it [student of the week] lets kids get a little bit of recognition for the things that they do. I love the honor roll rewards day that we're doing."
Student–Teacher Relationships	"Well, some students think that some teachers don't like them for whatever reason. And if the student feels like the teacher doesn't like them, then they're not going to try as hard in that particular class. If a teacher is more of a stricter teacher, a rule follower, and you've got a kid who likes to do more of what they want to do, but you call them out on it, they tend to think you don't like them. And they're not going to work as hard."

Once the transcripts were analyzed and themes were identified, a word search was conducted. The results of the word search can be found in Table 2, Themes and Frequency Codes from the Interview Data.

Table 2

Themes and Frequency Codes from the Interview Data

Themes	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
Home–School Connection	Parents	23
	Academics	13
	Expectations	6
	Home	24
Student Collaboration	Peers	17
	Friends	23
	Support	22
	Partner	18

School Climate	Administrator Presence	5
	Staff Relations	5
	School Safety	21
	Positive Student Recognition	38
	Student–Teacher Relationships	47

Survey Findings

The second data collection approach for this study was a survey. A closed-ended five-point Likert scale was used to collect data. The survey included three demographic questions and 11 prompts. It was administered using Google Forms. The five possible answers included Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Parental consent letters were sent home, and students were given one week to return the signed document if they wanted to participate in the survey. A total of 174 students obtained written parental consent and participated in the survey during their Cardinal Time class. Cardinal Time teachers administered the survey. Students had two days to complete the survey.

Survey Description of Participants

Survey participants included 77 sixth-grade students, 60 seventh-grade students, and 37 eighth-grade students; all obtained written parental consent. The participants included 101 female students, 66 male students, and seven students who preferred not to answer the gender question. Student self-reported ethnicity results included 89 White students, 32 students who marked that they were of other ethnicities, 21 students of two or more ethnicities, 20 African American students, six Native American/Pacific Islander students, and six Hispanic students.

Survey Results

Surveys were conducted with 174 participants to gain information about improving the academic motivation of students at Brighton Middle School. After students took the survey,

survey results were accessed on Google Forms for the purpose of data analysis. Next, the

frequencies and means of the Likert scale responses were calculated. The frequencies and means

are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency and Average of Survey Responses

Questions	Frequency					Mean
	5	4	3	2	1	
1. Students feel like they belong at Brighton Middle School.	42	71	50	5	6	3.8
2. Brighton Middle School has a safe learning environment.	59	73	32	6	4	4.0
3. Students at Brighton Middle School believe in their ability to achieve academically.	56	58	44	12	4	3.9
4. Students at Brighton Middle School are motivated to complete daily assignments.	28	57	56	19	14	3.4
5. Students at Brighton Middle School enjoy meaningful relationships with their teachers.	61	58	42	9	4	3.9
6. All students have equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at Brighton Middle School.	78	55	29	8	4	4.1
7. Teachers at Brighton Middle School care about their students.	88	49	29	5	3	3.9
8. Teachers at Brighton Middle School give students the opportunity to work with peers in the academic setting.	50	75	37	10	2	3.5
9. The after-school tutoring program benefits a large number of students who need extra help at Brighton Middle School.	64	58	46	4	2	4.0
10. Administrators at Brighton Middle School follow the schoolwide rules and consequences.	72	67	28	4	3	4.2
11. Brighton Middle School has a positive school climate.	57	61	41	6	9	3.9

Focus Group Findings

The third approach for data collection in this study was a single focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to collect data to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School from administrators' points of view. The focus group was conducted in the principal's office at Brighton Middle School. Questions were presented synchronously, and participants discussed their answers to eight semi-structured questions. The focus group lasted 58 minutes. It was recorded and immediately transcribed and analyzed for data analysis. Codes and themes were identified during the data analysis process. The participants included the principal, two assistant principals, the instructional facilitator, and the school counselor. The participants were appropriately chosen because they engaged daily with the student body by handling discipline issues, truancy, and student problems.

Focus Group Description of Participants

Participant One is the principal of the school. With 12 years of experience in the field of education, he has experience teaching seventh-grade math, language arts, and social studies, and fifth grade science and social studies before he became an assistant principal. He was an assistant principal for three years and is now in his second year as a principal. As principal, he handles many issues with teachers, students, and parents. He is ultimately responsible for the overall school climate and academic success of all students. His past experience in the classroom and his experience as an administrator were beneficial to the current study.

Participant Two is the schoolwide instructional facilitator for Brighton Middle School. She has been in her position for six years. Before that, she taught sixth-grade math for 17 years.

She also taught English for one year. In the instructional facilitator role, she is responsible for curriculum, progress monitoring, tutoring programs, and parent engagement. Her insight was beneficial to improving practices for motivating students academically.

Participant Three s the assistant principal who handles discipline for eighth grade students. This is his third year as an administrator. Before he became an administrator, he taught science and social studies. In total, Administrator Three has been in the field of education for 21 years. He is an advocate for the teachers at Brighton Middle School. His experience in the classroom and as an administrator proved valuable in the data collection process.

Participant Four was an assistant principal who handles discipline for seventh grade students and the comprehensive development class (CDC). The CDC class is a self-contained classroom for students with moderate to severe disabilities. She started in the field of education as an assistant in the preschool for 10 years. Then, she became a CDC teacher at the elementary school. Her next assignment was teaching sixth through 12th grades in court school, which is a school setting for students who are mandated to attend by a judge. Students are typically sent to court school for truancy or behavior problems. This is her second year as an assistant principal. Her experience with students at all levels proved to be an asset to the current study.

Participant Five was the school counselor. She has worked in the field of education since 2017. She has been a teacher's assistant, a substitute teacher, and a learning loss math tutor. This is her first year as a school counselor, and she is very involved with helping students and their families. Her experience with students and families provided a student-centered perspective.

Focus Group Results

A focus group was conducted with the principal, two assistant principals, the instructional facilitator, and the school counselor at Brighton Middle School to find codes and themes related

to improving the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School. The first step in the data analysis process was finding common words and phrases in the transcript of the focus group discussion. Next, I identified themes that were related to studying students' academic motivation. Finally, a table was created to organize the data into themes, codes, and participant quotations. Table 4 presents the themes, codes, and quotes from the focus group data.

Table 4

Codes and Themes for Focus Group Data

Themes	Codes	Participants' Quotes
Home–School Connection	Parents	"Once they (students) get that first discipline, the parents are very helpful. So, we don't have to see them (students) again."
	Families	"I think our faculty could do a better job of building relationships, not with the kids, but with families."
	Academic	"But getting them (parents) involved in their child's academics is very hard at the middle school level."
	Home–School Connection	"If the parents feel like they don't know how to do the work, or they don't know how to help the child with it and have no resources, it is harder to support them, the home–school connection."
School Climate	Teacher Morale	"I do think morale is low, not as much as other schools, but just with the trend in education. I think teachers do have a lot on their plate, have high expectations that they feel they sometimes can't meet."
	Discipline	"As far as discipline policies, there are consequences for your actions. We follow a by-the-book policy. It's cut and dry."
	School Safety	"I think it's (the school climate) safe. I think students feel safe here. I think we have measures in place for school safety, the school resource officer, the buzz in and out system, and the vape detectors."

Positive Student Recognition	"The student recognition committee comes up with ideas about how to celebrate growth or achievement on our different district tests."	

Once the transcripts were analyzed and themes were identified, a word search was conducted. Table 5, Frequency Codes from the Focus Group Data, includes the word search results.

Table 5

Themes and Frequency Codes from the Focus Group Data

Themes	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
Home–School Connection	Parents	13
	Families	5
	Academic	5
	Home–School Connection	8
School Climate	Teacher Morale	10
	Discipline	14
	School Safety	3
	Positive Student Recognition	12

Discussion of the Findings

The interviews with teachers revealed three predominant themes related to student motivation. The first theme was home–school connections, the second theme was student collaboration, and the third theme was school climate. The student survey results indicated that students were not highly motivated to turn in assignments. Additionally, the student survey revealed that students desired opportunities to collaborate with their peers. Finally, the focus group data analysis revealed two themes relevant to this study, which were home–school

connections and school climate. The discussion of the findings section analyzes similarities and differences within the data collection and analysis of this research. The discussion section also includes a comparison of the findings in relation to scholarly literature.

Home–School Connections

Home–school connections were a theme from both the teacher interviews and administrator focus group data analysis. When interviewed, teachers reported that students who have strong parental support were more likely to do well academically across subjects. Research has suggested that parental involvement in the form of attending parent–teacher conferences and having discussions about school with their children may lead to increased academic achievement (Barger et al., 2019). Parents were mentioned 23 times, and home was mentioned 24 times during the interviews. All seven teachers who were interviewed mentioned parents, home, or both. Teacher One said, "If parents place an importance on education, then usually, the students will try and rise to meet their parents' standards." Teacher Three noted that parents may neglect academic support in lieu of supporting extracurricular activities. She stated, "I think a lack of parental support is huge. Sometimes, I think parents believe they are supporting school when they support extracurricular activities." While teachers at Brighton Middle School may believe that parental involvement is important, fewer than 10 parents participate in the parent teacher organization and very few parents attend informational sessions or conferences. Athletics, band, and chorus events have the highest rates of parent participation and attendance.

The focus group participants shared similar ideas as the teachers regarding the value of home–school connections and parental support in relation to academic motivation. Participants also suggested that there is a need for resources to help parents provide academic support for their children. Parental support plays a vital role in student engagement and academic

achievement (Feng et al., 2019). During the focus group, parents were mentioned 13 times, and home was referred to six times. The participants brought up the need for teachers to support parents as they try to help their children academically. Participant One commented, "If the parents feel like they don't know how to do the work, or they don't know how to help the child with it and have no resources, it is harder to support them." Both teachers and focus group participants spoke about the impact of parental support on academic achievement, yet there is a lack of parental support for many students at Brighton Middle School.

Additionally, the data analysis of the focus group revealed that participants believed parents play a role in helping with discipline problems and encouraging appropriate behavior. The participants spoke of the impact of parental involvement in discipline issues, noting the word "discipline" five times during the focus group. According to Bryson and Childs (2018), parental involvement in the school community may help create a positive perception of the school environment while decreasing disorderly student behaviors. Students who have positive perceptions of the school environment develop a sense of relatedness in the school community, which is one of the basic psychological needs set forth in SDT (Shin & Bolkan, 2021).

School Climate

The analysis of the teacher interviews also identified school climate as an important theme in the study. The importance of the school climate theme was revealed in all three data collection methods. In the student survey, Prompt 11, "Brighton Middle School has a positive school climate," had an average score of 3.9. School climate has been shown to directly impact student achievement and behavior, as it sets the tone for all teaching and learning in the school community (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). There are many facets of school climate, including leadership, physical environment, safety, teaching and instruction, relationships and social

connections, and shared beliefs and values (Rudasill et al., 2018). These facets of school climate can either promote or weaken students' academic motivation based on how students' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as noted in the SDT, are met within the school climate (Wang et al., 2020).

The teacher interviews revealed school climate to be an important theme with 173 mentions of some aspect of school climate. The word teacher was used 39 times; environment was discussed 13 times; climate was used eight times; and present was mentioned five times. The word "teacher" was used to communicate teacher behaviors that can either encourage or discourage student engagement, teacher care, and teachers' relationships with students. Teacher One expressed concern over negative comments that teachers made and the adverse impact on students. Teacher One said, "So, I know there's some (teachers) that have made negative comments about certain things going on in the world, and that's completely shut out several students where they refused to do anything for those teachers and have even skipped class because of those teachers." Zhang et al. (2019) viewed teachers as one of the most important environmental factors that impact students within the school community. They play an important role in establishing positive classroom environments and positive student–teacher relationships. As in the teacher interview, the results of the student survey revealed that students do experience positive student–teacher relationships at Brighton Middle School. For Prompts 5 and 7, the survey results had a mean score of 3.9, which means students agree with the statements. Prompt 5 read, "Students at Brighton Middle School enjoy meaningful relationships with their teachers." Prompt 7 stated, "Teachers at Brighton Middle School care about their students." Furthermore, when describing the school environment at Brighton Middle School, Teachers Two and Three considered the school environment at Brighton Middle School a "family environment,"

explaining that family members care about each other even though they sometimes have disagreements. Overall, the analysis of interview transcripts indicated that the school climate at Brighton Middle School has changed in a positive way since the 2021–2022 school year. Teachers acknowledged administrators' efforts to improve the school climate. Finally, principals set the tone for the school; they wield a great deal of influence over the school climate (Capp et al., 2021). When teachers used the word "present," they expressed a desire to have the principals present in their classrooms. Teacher Six stated, "I wish they [principals] were more present. I mean, even in my room. I'm not ashamed of what I'm doing here. Come on in." Although administrators are visible in the lobby between classes, are available to handle discipline problems, and complete teacher observations, they do not go into the classrooms to see what the students are doing on a regular basis.

Like the interview results, the analysis of the focus group data also revealed the importance of the school climate theme. The results of the focus group suggested a different perspective of school climate than that of the teachers' interviews. While the teachers discussed school climate in terms of how their actions impact students and how they wanted to see an increased presence from administration, the administrators discussed new rules and committees that were put in place to increase student motivation and teacher morale. Like teachers, administrators felt that the school environment at Brighton Middle School had changed positively. One rule change that impacted the school environment was that students were required to turn their phones off at the beginning of each school day. The word "phone" was mentioned seven times during the focus group. Administrators also mentioned the new committees that were established for the 2022–2023 year. The word "committee" was mentioned seven times during the focus group. The morale committee was established to ensure that the

teachers' need to be affirmed for their hard work and need to feel supported by administrators were being met. They established a wall of positivity in the mailroom where teachers and administrators could write positive notes to members of the staff. A student recognition committee was also created to celebrate the great things students do each day. Teachers recognized a student each week for making good choices, going the extra mile, or making extraordinary academic gains. Research has suggested that student productivity and achievement correlates to healthy interpersonal relationships within the school community (Barksdale et al., 2021). The student of the week, student of the month, and honor roll celebrations were all established to strengthen student–teacher relationships and celebrate student success.

Discipline is another word that was coded in the data analysis for the focus group. It was found five times in the transcript. Administrator One stated, "I think having a discipline policy is a great thing because I think it actually helps the issue of motivation because there are consequences for not doing work. There are consequences for your behavior. There are consequences for whatever you are doing here at school." While administrators felt that discipline was consistent, the data analysis of the teacher interviews found that the word discipline was coded 14 times, and four teacher participants expressed the desire for discipline to be consistent throughout the school setting. Teacher Four stated, "If we all enforce the rules, then it would be a more disciplined school. And, if it was a more disciplined school, I think that would relate to higher achievement scores and happiness within the climate." Research has suggested that a positive view of how discipline is handled in the school can impact students' perception of the school environment and positively impact student achievement (Capp et al., 2021). The student survey results revealed that the students at Brighton Middle School felt safe in the learning environment, as noted by the mean score of 4.0 for Prompt 2, which stated

"Brighton Middle School has a safe learning environment." Additionally, Prompt 11 on the student survey, "Brighton Middle School has a positive school climate," had an average score of 3.9 of students agreeing with the statement. According to previous research, all parties involved in school settings benefit from a positive environment where students and teachers feel safe and supported by the principals (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Finally, Prompt 10 of the student survey stated, "Administrators at Brighton Middle School follow the schoolwide rules and consequences." Students responded with an average score of 4.2, the highest level of agreement with a prompt. Therefore, administrators and students felt that the discipline policies were enforced on a regular basis. Teachers, however, viewed some inconsistencies in who enforced the schoolwide rules.

Student Collaboration

Research has suggested that students' feelings of autonomy and competence increase when they are given the opportunity to work collaboratively (Alley, 2019). The third overarching theme found in the analysis of the interviews is student collaboration. The code words associated with student collaboration included peers, friends, support, and partner, yielding a total of 80 mentions of one of the code words throughout the interviews. Five out of the seven teachers interviewed allowed their students to work with their peers in some capacity in their weekly assignments. Implementing cooperative learning strategies that allow students to work together in groups instead of competing with one another or working in isolation may strengthen student relationships and sense of belonging, resulting in a positive impact on academic motivation and achievement (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Teacher Seven explained how she manages cooperative learning, "I set that clear instruction at the very beginning that I wasn't going to tolerate any play time. So, this was strictly lab work, and if they couldn't do it, then they would be working alone.

And it seems to work great because they don't do that. They want to work with a partner."

Teacher Four told the following story that relates to how student collaboration led to a

friendship, "I had two students—eighth graders—yesterday telling me that when I partnered

them up in sixth grade for an activity we were doing on adaptations; that's when they became

friends. And they are best friends now." Teachers told stories of how students developed

friendships and exhibited leadership skills as a result of working with peers in collaborative

groups.

Additionally, the eighth prompt on the student survey elicited an average of 3.5 out of 5,

indicating an average score between neutral and agreeing that teachers give students the

opportunity to work with their peers in the academic setting. The prompt, "Teachers at Brighton

Middle School give students the opportunity to work with peers in the academic setting," yielded

the second lowest mean score of all student responses, indicating a slight gap between teachers'

perceptions of student collaboration and students' views; teachers may not implement

opportunities for peer interaction as often as students would desire. Cooperative learning can

influence academic motivation while satisfying students' needs for competence, autonomy, and

relatedness (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020). When students are allowed to work together, they

explain, rationalize, argue their points, and develop strong peer relationships, enhancing their

sense of belonging and motivation.

Motivation to Turn in Assignments

Another finding from the student survey is that students are not highly motivated to turn

in assignments. Data collection revealed an average of 3.4 out of 5 on the fourth prompt, which

states, "Students at Brighton Middle School are motivated to complete daily assignments." This

was the lowest score on the student survey, indicating an average score between neutral and

agreement that students are motivated to complete assignments. This finding aligns with the research problem that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. Analysis of the Prompt 3 indicated that students at Brighton Middle School believe in their ability to achieve academically with a mean score of 3.9, yet, often times, they do not complete or turn in assignments. Although the surveyed students tend to believe in their ability to complete their assignments, they are not motivated to complete academic tasks. Students may experience external motivation when they receive recognition for being the student of the week or a reward from their teacher after turning in assignments. Such external regulation could eventually lead to introjected regulation, in which the students turn in assignments to avoid feelings of guilt, or integrated regulation, in which they turn in work to satisfy personal goals of receiving a good grade (Trigueros et al., 2019). While teachers may prefer students who are intrinsically motivated, not all students will be motivated to participate in all classes or on all assignments.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presented the Interview Findings, Survey Findings, Focus Group Findings, and Discussion of the Findings.

Chapter Five: Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presents the Recommendations, Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders, Resources Needed, Timeline, and Summary.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The central research question for this study was: How can the practice of motivating students academically be improved at Brighton Middle School in Brighton, Tennessee? Grounded in a review of the scholarly literature and data collection and analysis, five viable solutions are recommended to answer the central research question. The five recommendations are:

1. Principals should be more present in classrooms;

2. Teachers should give students more opportunities to work with their peers;

3. Teachers should make positive contact with parents;

4. Parents should be recruited to serve on school committees; and

5. Family academic work sessions should be scheduled two times per grading period.

Recommendation for Principals to Be More Present in Classrooms

The first recommendation to resolve the problem of low academic motivation is for principals to be more present in the classrooms. In the focus group, administrators expressed a desire to support teachers. In the interviews, five of the teachers suggested that administrators

could be more present in their classrooms. While principals at Brighton Middle School are visible throughout the day in the cafeteria, in the atrium between classes, at stations during dismissal, and in the classrooms during teacher observations, teachers want the principals to come into the classrooms to engage with the students during lessons. Contemporary literature has suggested that the principal sets the tone for the school climate by establishing expectations for instruction, student behavior, and high academic standards (Mousena & Raptis, 2021). Increased principal presence in the classrooms could be accomplished if principals planned to visit six classrooms a week for 10 minutes at a time. This would require each of the four principals to set aside an hour each week for classroom visits. During the visits, principals can offer positive feedback by leaving notes for the teacher or students, highlighting good student behavior or excellent teaching strategies. Principals can also engage with the students by participating in lessons, engaging in student groups or monitoring students as they work. Students would enjoy working with the principals because they are role models for the students.

Some negative aspects of increased principal presence are increased stress for teachers, disruption in classrooms, and increased responsibility and time constraints for principals. Teachers have to be on task and follow their lesson plans if they do not know when a principal may drop in for a visit. Teachers may perceive the visit as a formal observation instead of an opportunity to build relationships and provide support. Teachers who do not agree with the principal's mission for the school may feel alienated and threatened by the principal visits. Additionally, at the beginning, students may be distracted by a principal coming into the classroom, but with training and consistent visits, principal presence in the classroom can become a normal part of the learning environment. Finally, principals may struggle to set aside

time to visit the classrooms because they have meetings, daily responsibilities, and unexpected parent and student issues to address each day.

There are many positive aspects associated with increased principal presence in the classroom: increased student motivation to participate in learning activities, improved student behavior, increased time on task for teachers and students, and a unified vision of expectations for students and teachers. The principal's influence can have a positive impact on the school climate and student achievement (Capp et al., 2021). The interview results revealed that teachers want everyone to be consistent with enforcing discipline policies. Knowing that the principal could casually walk into the classroom at any time could be a deterrent for bad behavior or lack of effort. Although principals are extremely busy handling the day-to-day operations of the school, their presence in the classrooms could reduce behavioral problems and office referrals, leading to higher student engagement and academic motivation. Students may be more inclined to complete and turn in assignments, participate in class discussions or activities, and practice positive classroom behaviors if they know that principals may show up in their classrooms.

Research has suggested that the principal establishes expectations for instruction (Redding et al., 2019). The regular presence of principals in classrooms can also help with teacher consistency in academic instruction, classroom management, and enforcement of school rules, thus creating a more unified vision for the school. Although principal presence in the classroom could be stressful for some teachers, the visits can give principals the opportunity to build positive relationships with the teachers and students. During the visits, principals can also learn teachers' strengths and weaknesses. They could use this valuable information to create professional development opportunities for teachers.

Recommendation for More Student Collaboration

The second recommendation for improving students' academic motivation at Brighton Middle School is that teachers should integrate opportunities for student collaboration into their lessons as often as possible. Both teachers and administrators agree that peer relationships are an important aspect of student motivation and the classroom environment. Student motivation increases when cooperative learning opportunities are integrated into lessons (Alley, 2019). Cooperative learning involves allowing students to collaborate, share their ideas, and explain their reasoning instead of working alone or competing with one another. Four of the teachers who were interviewed said that they plan for cooperative learning opportunities in their classrooms. Some teachers allow students opportunities to work together more often than others. Students' perceptions of the classroom environment and motivation improve when they are given the opportunity to collaborate with their peers on academic tasks (Barksdale et al., 2021). Student collaboration can be as simple as using think-pair-share or discussing the answer to a question with an elbow partner, allowing students to discuss with students who sit next to them; alternatively, it can involve more elaborate projects or problem-solving tasks. Both simple and more elaborate forms of student collaboration give students the opportunity to share their ideas and learn from their peers. When allowing students to work together, teachers must clearly define the expectations for behavior and the academic goals related to the assignment. Students must know exactly what the academic objectives are and how they will be assessed in cooperative learning activities. Teachers must also be intentional when creating partners or small groups. Students may experience increased motivation and academic achievement because in these activities, they can become more engaged in the learning process.

The downside to collaborative learning is that it takes extra planning time for teachers, it can seem loud and chaotic, and it can require financial resources for supplies to complete learning tasks. Poor instructional delivery and academic content can impede student confidence (Usher et al., 2019). Therefore, teachers must be diligent in providing learning opportunities that help students achieve the targeted learning goals in a way that addresses a variety of learning styles. Teachers must also take instructional time to establish clear expectations for behavior and academic work for student groups. Another possible hindrance to student collaboration is that some students prefer to work alone because they are uncomfortable in group settings. Some students lack confidence in their academic competence and may be hesitant to become active members in a collaborative learning group. Finally, students may see cooperative learning activities as an opportunity to play, disrupt, copy others' work, or allow others to do the work. Such negative aspects of student collaboration can be overcome when the teacher establishes clear expectations for student behavior and students practice working together.

The positive aspects of student collaboration far outweigh the negative. When students collaborate, they satisfy their basic needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competency as they negotiate, justify their reasoning, and help others. SDT posits that students thrive in learning environments that promote autonomy, relatedness, and competency (Chen et al., 2021). When teachers challenge their students and encourage collaboration, their students can be more engaged, experience increased self-efficacy, and achieve increased learning and academic performance (Shin & Bolkan, 2021). Student collaboration may result in healthier student relationships and positive classroom environments in which students and teachers can work together to achieve common goals. When planning for student collaboration, teachers give students opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge in various ways that address students'

different learning styles. Some students have experienced increased intrinsic motivation when given the opportunity to participate in collaborative learning exercises (Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020). Student engagement and motivation increase as their autonomy, relatedness, and competence grow as a result of working in a collaborative environment.

Recommendation for Positive Parent Contact

The third recommendation to improve the practice of motivating students at Brighton Middle School is for teachers to make positive parent contact for each student at least once a semester. Both teachers and administrators noted the importance of parental support during the data collection process. Teachers should contact parents with positive and encouraging comments about students at least once a semester. Teachers may contact parents by phone, email, or written notes. Through such contact, teachers can learn valuable information about a student's culture, values, language, and home life, which can help teachers establish a positive learning environment in which all students feel cared for and comfortable (Kumar et al., 2018).

However, both parents and teachers could hinder the recommendation for teachers to make positive parent contact. Not all parents want to hear from the school because they are accustomed to receiving negative calls from teachers or administrators. Some parents may have trust issues with the school based on their past experiences. Teachers may feel like taking the time to make positive parental contact with every student is just another thing on the list of things to do. They may not realize the value of reaching out to parents if nothing is wrong. Another obstacle to positive parent contact is time. Teacher planning times are often filled with collaborative meetings with other teachers in their subject areas, grade level meetings, committee meetings, and individualized education plan meetings; they also have to make copies, plan lessons, and take restroom breaks. Making positive contact with every parent can take a long

time because classes can have 20 to 35 students for each of five class periods. The principal plays a key role in helping teachers understand the value of creating positive connections with parents or caregivers. Another hurdle to teachers making positive parental contact is the expense of mailing notes because teachers need notecards and stamps if they decide to write notes.

Nevertheless, there are many benefits to establishing a system for positive parent contact. Positive contact with parents may help strengthen home–school connections. Positive parent contact could also strengthen student–teacher relationships because it shows that the teacher cares enough to reach out to the parents. Positive parent contact is also important for teachers because parents can help teachers get to know their students, in turn helping teachers to design lessons that are engaging and authentic. Students benefit academically and emotionally when they believe their teachers care for them (Zhang et al., 2019). In addition, a simple conversation with a parent could give the teacher valuable information about a student's cultural background, interests, and motivations. Some benefits of teachers strengthening relationships with parents is that parents may be more supportive when problems arise; they may also encourage their children to value education or take the opportunity to get involved in the school community.

Recommendation for Parents to Serve on Committees

The fourth recommendation to resolve the issue of low student academic motivation at Brighton Middle School is to invite parents to serve on committees that serve the school's needs. As previously stated, both administrators and teachers agree that parental support and involvement is crucial to academic motivation and student success. Students who perceive that their parents are supportive of their learning tend to have higher academic achievement (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Administrators and teachers should recruit parents to serve on the morale committee, the parent engagement committee, and the student recognition committee. The

morale committee's goal is to boost teacher morale by having monthly challenges and delivering special treats, including drinks, candy, or supplies, to teachers. The parent engagement committee works to plan events that build community with teachers, parents, and students. The student recognition committee recognizes students for academic achievement, excellent behavior, and academic growth. Additionally, more parents could serve in the parent teacher organization by working the concession stand, where they sell candy, drinks, popcorn, and nachos to raise funds for the school. Parents also plan events such as dances, the haunted house, and other fundraisers. When parents get involved and serve on committees, they will build strong relationships with teachers as they share ideas and work towards a common goal. Parents will also provide valuable insight into what motivates their children, their likes and dislikes, and their cultural values, giving teachers valuable information that can be used to help motivate students in the classroom. As members of the school community work toward improving the climate at Brighton Middle School by serving on committees that celebrate the teachers and students, there will be an increased unity among teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

Parent schedules and parental willingness are two factors that may hinder parents from serving on committees and becoming more involved in the school community. Many parents work during the day, and some may work more than one job. Others have multiple children and are not available to volunteer during the school day because they do not have childcare for the younger siblings. Other parents may not want to get involved at school because they have had negative experiences with teachers or school administration. Financial constraints may also hinder some parents from getting involved. Parent volunteers must have a background check performed at their own expense. The background check costs $40. Some parents may not be able to volunteer because they cannot pass the background check.

Community support, increased student motivation and engagement, and a decrease in delinquent behaviors are all positive aspects of parental involvement. Parental involvement is associated with positive student achievement, increased student motivation and engagement, and social adjustment (Barger et al., 2019). Parents who serve on committees have a positive influence on the school climate; they are visible and work to support the school staff and the students of Brighton Middle School. Additionally, parents can bring a different perspective and new ideas to the committees because they know what motivates their children. Teachers will benefit when parents are involved on committees because it will give them the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with the parents as they work together to achieve committee goals. Furthermore, making parents a visible part of the school community adds to students' support systems, thereby integrating them into a model of working together to achieve a common goal. Students who feel supported by their parents are more likely to be motivated to achieve academically and overcome the academic and emotional challenges they face at school (Basharpoor et al., 2022). Having parents in the building may improve student behavior, support teachers, and provide some accountability for students. Behavior may improve because students tend to act differently around their parents. When students are friends in middle school, their parents are usually acquainted or may be friends with their friends' parents; therefore, a student may think twice before misbehaving in front of a friend's parent. When parents are active in the school community, students are held accountable for their actions; this adds an extra layer of reinforcement of school rules and expectations for student behavior and achievement. Most parents want the best for their children; when they are involved in the school community, they can support their children and other students who need help. Students then know that they have the support of a community of caring adults.

Recommendation to Schedule Family Academic Work Sessions

The final recommendation to resolve the issue of low academic motivation at Brighton Middle School is to host family academic work sessions twice per grading period so that teachers and parents can help students who have low grades or missing assignments. Parental involvement is an important factor in students' academic success (Barger et al., 2019). The focus group and interview data indicated a consistent theme of home–school connections, with both administrators and teachers using words like "parents," "home–school connection," "academics," and "home." The parent engagement committee can plan family academic events that build community and support students academically. Academic work sessions would provide opportunities for parents and students to come to the school to work on subjects in which students are missing work, have low grades, or just need extra help. Such sessions can be held during the fourth and eighth weeks of each grading period. Teachers can receive flex day credit for volunteering to work at family academic work sessions. Students who want to improve their grades or receive help with missing assignments could attend with their parents. Teachers can help students by answering questions or teaching specific skills.

Low parent attendance and a lack of teachers who are willing to put in extra work may be challenges to this particular recommendation. Teachers may be unable to work during the academic support nights due to their own family commitments or alternate employment. The parent engagement committee must think outside of the box when advertising the academic work sessions because parents may not be as involved at the middle school level as they are at the elementary school level. The administration may even consider offering families free food to entice them to attend the event.

Students, parents, and teachers could all benefit from such academic work sessions. Students receive extra help, have an opportunity to turn in missing assignments or work on assignments that earned low grades. Parents can obtain resources and learn tips on how to help their children as teachers, parents, and students work together. Teachers who participate in these events can show that they care about their students' success. This is important because students who believe their teachers care about them have shown increased academic motivation (Umarji et al., 2021). Such work sessions can thus build student confidence, hold students accountable, and encourage parents to get involved in their children's education. Academic work sessions can strengthen the home–school connection, and students can see that a community of adults cares about them, values their education, and wants to see them succeed.

Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The delineation of the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders is essential to solving the problem identified for this research study. It is important for all parties involved to have a specific plan for implementing the recommendations made in this study. The roles and responsibilities in implementing these recommendations—encouraging principals be more present in the classrooms, allowing more opportunities for students to work with their peers, making positive contact with parents, recruiting parents to serve on school committees, and scheduling family academic activity sessions—are described in this section.

Principals Being More Present in Classrooms

It is recommended that principals be more present in the classrooms throughout the school day to improve students' academic motivation at Brighton Middle School. Principals, teachers, and students have specific roles and responsibilities to fulfill in implementing this recommendation.

Principals

It is recommended that principals set aside specific time each week to observe teachers and students in classrooms and thus improve the academic motivation of students at Brighton Middle School. This should only take about 10 minutes per class unless the principals become so engaged that they do not want to leave. If each assistant principal and the principal set aside an hour each week to visit classrooms for 10-minute observations, they could each visit six classrooms for a total of 24 classrooms each week. The assistant principals can visit classrooms from the grade level they serve, and the principal can make his rounds to all classes. After quietly entering the classroom, the principal can engage in the lesson, monitor student work, or prompt students to be active learners. The principals' presence in classrooms may initially be somewhat disruptive, but it can eventually become normal. The principal can carry a notepad to jot down encouraging notes for students and teachers.

Teachers

Teachers need to submit detailed weekly lesson plans, as they are already required to do, so that the principals can select a good time to visit classrooms based on the planned learning activities. In preparation for increased principal presence, teachers should teach students how to respond when a guest enters the room. Students should be given clear expectations for behavior and taught how to respond to adults. Teachers should not stop teaching to acknowledge the principal because it may disrupt the flow of the lesson. However, teachers can involve the principal in the lesson by recommending a group to join or asking the principal a question as they ask students questions during the lesson.

Students

When the principal comes in, the students should remain focused on the lesson and learning activities. Although that may be difficult in the beginning, students can eventually become accustomed to principals visiting their classrooms, and this can become a normal part of their day.

More Student Collaboration

It is recommended that teachers regularly integrate opportunities for peer collaboration into their lessons on a regular basis to help improve students' academic motivation. The use of collaborative learning strategies in the classroom has been found to increase student motivation and academic achievement (Alley, 2019). Both teachers and students have roles and responsibilities that can make peer collaborations successful.

Teachers

Teachers must take time to plan for collaborative learning opportunities. Planning engaging lessons can be time-consuming and difficult because the teacher may have to acquire supplies, make copies, or organize materials for these cooperative learning activities. Often, teachers can find resources embedded within the mandated curriculum. Student collaboration can be integrated into lessons by asking students discuss the answers to questions that require higher-order thinking skills with the peers at their table or with elbow partners. Teachers also need to consider how they want to group or partner the students for cooperative learning activities. Students can be partnered based on similar abilities, mixed abilities, personality, or work ethic. Another option is to allow students to pick their own partners. Next, teachers need to clearly establish behavior expectations for working with peers, and learning objectives must be

explicitly defined for each lesson. Finally, teachers must monitor the learning activity to ensure that students are held accountable for their work and behavior.

Students

Students must be held accountable for adhering to the behavior expectations and working toward the learning objectives. All students need to engage in the activity, sharing their ideas, participating in discussions, justifying their thoughts, asking questions, and completing the assignment. When students are engaged in the collaborative learning process, they gain knowledge and increase their competence, autonomy, and relatedness, thus increasing their academic motivation.

Positive Parent Contact

Both teachers and administrators stressed the importance of home–school connections, and communication between parents and the teacher is a key component of this theme. Teachers can be proactive in establishing positive relationships with parents by connecting with parents in a positive and encouraging way and thus exhibiting caring behaviors. Academic motivation and students' sense of belonging are likely to increase when students feel that their teachers genuinely care about their overall well-being (Tas et al., 2019). Administrators and teachers should both play a role in establishing positive parent contact.

Administrators

Administrators should be responsible for securing notecards and stamps for teachers who prefer to communicate with written notes. Administrators should give teachers an allotted time to complete initial positive parent contact during in-service hours at the beginning of the school year. The administrators may also need to help teachers to see the value of the positive parent contact so that teachers do not resent it as just another thing for them to do. Administrators may

need to allocate time for parent communication twice per grading period. For instance, instead of scheduling a collaborative meeting, administrators can give teachers time to make positive parent contacts. Allotting time for teachers to complete positive parent contact will help teachers see the value the principal places on making positive contact and help teachers feel like it is not just a task that must be checked off of the list of things to do.

Teachers

Teachers need to set aside time to make phone calls, write notes, or send emails to their students at least one time each grading period. Taking time to reach out during each grading period can help teachers divide the contacts into halves so that half of the parents can be contacted each grading term, allowing teachers to make contact with each student's parents at least once a semester. Teachers can send a welcome card at the beginning of the school year. Teachers can also set aside 30 minutes of their planning time each week to make positive parent contact. Teachers would be responsible for documenting how they communicated with the parent on a communication log. When teachers communicate with parents, they may learn valuable information about their students that can help them better motivate students academically.

Parents Serving on Committees

In support of the theme of school climate, I recommend that parents serve on school committees because the data analysis of both the interviews and the focus group identified the theme of home–school connection. When parents serve alongside teachers on committees that benefit the students and teachers at Brighton Middle School, the community will become stronger. One way to improve practices for motivating students academically is by building strong relationships with students and parents; the committees will be an avenue for parents to build strong relationships with teachers. Parent involvement in the school community has been

linked to school achievement (Barger et al., 2019). If parents get involved in the school community, students have the opportunity to see administrators, teachers, and their parents working together to support them in their academic endeavors. Administrators, teachers, and parents all have responsibilities in implementing the recommendation to have parents serve on committees.

Administrators

Administrators must approve of inviting parents to join the morale committee, the parent engagement committee, and the student recognition committee. Once approved, the administrators must advertise the need for parent volunteers and encourage parents to join the committees. The principals have a unique opportunity to ask parents to get involved when they meet with parents about discipline or truancy issues. Convincing parents to participate on school committees or to work the concession stand during the school day may be difficult. Therefore, administrators may need to offer incentives to parents who get involved. Such incentives could include a pass to school sporting events, box seats at the football games, a free personalized ad in the yearbook, or the opportunity to have lunch with their child. The principal may also consider hosting a luncheon or dinner to celebrate the volunteers each semester.

Teachers

Teachers can recruit parents who may be interested in joining a committee. All teachers are required to join a committee. As teachers reach out to parents to make positive contact, they may find some parents eager to get involved at Brighton Middle School. Once parents join a committee, teachers may need to be flexible when setting meeting times to accommodate the schedules of parents or offer the option of meeting via video conferencing. Teachers might also set up video conferences and make sure parents have the link to attend virtual meetings.

Parents

Parents are volunteers who can share their ideas and expertise and take action to support the students and teachers at Brighton Middle School. The morale committee serves teachers and helps to create a positive work community. The parent engagement committee is responsible for planning activities that support families at Brighton Middle School. Finally, the student recognition committee is responsible for the student of the week awards, honor roll reward days, and student of the month. Parents can also become active participants in the parent teacher organization. They can run a concession stand, host dances for the students, host a haunted house for the community, and plan other fundraiser events. Funds raised can benefit the students and teachers at Brighton Middle School by helping pay for classroom supplies, stocking the rooms with hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes, or hosting student picnics. Parent involvement will increase academic motivation as students feel supported by parents who are willing to volunteer their time at the school. Parents who serve on school committees will also contribute to an improved school climate as they work with the teachers.

Scheduling Family Academic Work Session

Planning family academic work sessions can benefit students academically and improve students' academic motivation, encouraging parents and students to work together with teachers. When students work in a safe, supportive learning environment, they may experience enhanced academic motivation and engagement (Feng et al., 2019). Administrators, teachers, parents, and students all have roles and responsibilities in the family academic work sessions.

Administrators

Administrators have to approve the family academic work sessions and advertise them so families will know about them. Sessions should take place during the fourth and eighth weeks of

each grading period. Administrators must also approve any funds necessary for feeding families

if they decide to provide a meal or snacks for participants. Additionally, need to reach out to

parents who have children who are failing a class to encourage their attendance. Once parents

have signed up to attend the academic work session, administrators can gather a list of missing

work or assignments that need to be improved for each student that will be in attendance.

Administrators can also coordinate with the Tipton County Schools Family Resource Center to

provide resources for parents during the sessions. Such resources may include information about

how parents can use them throughout the school year to help all their children at various grade

levels. At the event, administrators can greet families, direct them to their grade level or subject

matter, cook or serve food to families, and help clean up.

Teachers

While administrators are responsible for inviting parents and students who are failing

classes, teachers can recommend that students who are missing assignments or have earned low

grades to encourage them to attend the family academic events. Parents can be contacted with

written notice or phone calls. The events can also be posted on the school website and social

media. All teachers must submit missing assignments or a list of assignments with failing grades

for each student who is signed up to attend the work session to administrators. Some teachers can

volunteer to work at one event each semester to help the parent and student on missing work or

work to improve assignments with low grades. The teachers can also provide resources for

parents so that they can help their children at home. Such resources may include a sheet of

shortcuts for using calculators, links to websites that students can access for tutorial videos, and

information about the Tipton County Schools Family Resource Center. Teachers can work with

individuals or small groups of students and their parents on specific assignments and academic

skills. Teachers can also answer parents' questions and help the parents understand the curriculum and ways to help their child succeed academically.

Parents

Parents can attend the events with their children and participate in the tutoring session so that they know exactly why the student is struggling and how to complete the required assignments. At the events, parents can ask questions and learn about the curriculum that their children are studying. They can also gather and use extra resources that are available to supplement homework time. Parents can then hold their children accountable for completing their work throughout the school year.

Students

Students are responsible for telling their parents about the event and knowing what assignments they need to complete. They then work collaboratively with the teacher, parent(s), and other families who are working on similar assignments or academic skills. Students can complete and submit any unfinished assignments that are not completed during the work session.

Resources Needed

The resources needed to improve the practice of motivating students at Brighton Middle School include time and money. When it comes to implementing the recommendations for this study, it is important to provide a plan for how administrators and teachers' time will be managed and how the money will be secured and spent. The necessary resources are described in this section.

Principals Being More Present in the Classrooms

The main resource for the recommendation of principals being more present in classrooms is time. Each of the assistant principals and the principal have to set aside time to

visit classrooms each week. The goal is for each principal to make six 10-minute visits each week for a total of four hours and 24 classroom visits. Some possible ways for these administrators to visit classrooms for one hour a week and make six total visits include spending one hour in one day, 20 minutes a day for three days, or in between meetings and other responsibilities. The administrators also need sticky notes or notecards so they can write a few encouraging words to the students or the teacher. Note cards or sticky notes would cost less than $100 for the school year. The principal can secure the money from the concession stand profits.

More Student Collaboration

This recommendation requires teachers to invest time into planning collaborative activities. Teachers have an hour-long planning period each day. Although implementing elbow partners or table talk will not cost money, this requires the teacher to spend instruction time to teach the students the expectations for student collaboration and discussion. Additionally, teachers may have to find, borrow, make, or purchase necessary supplies for implementing collaborative activities. All teachers are allotted a $200 stipend for instructional supplies at the beginning of the year. After that money is spent, teachers pay for instructional supplies with their own funds. Nevertheless, teachers at Brighton Middle School are very generous. If a teacher needs supplies, they can send an email to all teachers, and a colleague generally share if they have the requested materials. The parent teacher organization also purchases instructional supplies if requests are approved by the principal.

Positive Parent Contact

Time is the main resource required to implement the recommendation for positive parent contact. Teachers need dedicated time to reach out to the parents of all their students at least once a semester. Administrators can give teachers a three-hour block of time during mandatory in-

service days in August 2023 to contact parents. Administrators could also cancel weekly collaborative meetings twice a grading period so that teachers have sufficient time to make positive contact with parents, giving teachers two hours each grading period to work toward making positive parent contact for each student. Teachers may have to use their planning time to establish contact with parents that were not contacted during the time allotted by administration. Teachers could use their entire hour of planning each day or spend 15 or 20 minutes each planning period until they contact the parents of all of their students. The only other necessary resource is monetary funding to pay for note cards and postage, which would constitute an annual expense of at most $500. The cost ultimately depends on how many teachers want to write notes and have them delivered by the postal service.

Parents Serving on Committees

The main resource needed for the recommendation to have parents serving on committees is time from administrators, teachers, and parents. Integrating parents into the school committees may require administrators and teachers to meet outside of school hours to accommodate parent schedules. Most committees only meet for 45 minutes to an hour each time they convene. The committees can either meet once a month or once every other month. If meetings cannot be held in person at the school, committee members can meet via video conferencing. The time and financial resources needed will ultimately vary for each committee and its planned activities. Any monetary needs will be approved by the principal. The principal can then secure funds from the school budget or utilize profits from the concession stand.

Scheduling Family Academic Work Sessions

The recommendation to schedule family academic work sessions requires significant resources in terms of time and money. All expenses must be approved by the principal. The

primary expense would be food for the participants if the principal approves a meal for the families that come to work. The principal should plan a maximum expense of $500 for each session for a total of $4,000 for the year. This money can be used to provide snacks or a meal for the families that attend the work sessions. The financial burden may be alleviated if local businesses donate to the cause. Snacks may include trail mix, fresh fruit, water, or granola bars. A meal may involve hot dogs or hamburgers, chips, fruit, and water. Another expense may be educational resources for the families in the form of basic school supplies, calculators, rulers, or project supplies. An annual budget for educational resources for these events should not exceed $1,600. The other resource is teachers' and administrators' time. The family night would be held after school hours; therefore, administrators and teachers would need to volunteer their time during the evening hours. Teachers may be compensated with a stipend of $30 per hour. Another option is for teachers to earn flex time for their hours of service, giving them credit for days off that are typically earned by participating in professional development.

Timeline

All recommendations will be implemented at the beginning of the school year and continue throughout the year. As each recommendation is applied in the school setting, adjustments may need to be made to the timeline or the methods employed. All parties will need to be flexible.

Principals Being More Present in the Classrooms

Principals will start being more present in classrooms at the beginning of the school year in August 2023. See Table 6 for the Timeline for Principals to Be More Present in Classrooms.

Table 6

Timeline for Principals to Be More Present in Classrooms

Date	Action Item
August 1, 2023	Principal introduces the plan to visit classrooms for about 10 minutes at a time and to interact with the students during their lessons.
August 14, 2023 +	Principals begin to visit six classrooms a week for 10 minutes at a time until the end of the school year.
August 24, 2023	Principals and teachers meet during a faculty meeting to discuss the pros and cons of the principal visits.
September 28, 2023	Principals and teachers meet during a faculty meeting to revisit any changes that may need to be made for the visits.

More Student Collaboration

Implementation for more peer collaboration will take approximately two months. See

Table 7 for the Timeline for More Student Collaboration.

Table 7

Timeline for More Student Collaboration

Date	Action Item
July 10, 2023	Ask two teachers who integrate collaborative learning activities into their daily lessons to create a professional development session for teachers to attend during the August 2nd in-service session.
July 10, 2023– August 1, 2023	Teachers plan collaborative learning professional development session.
August 1, 2023	Principals introduce the expectation for teachers to integrate more peer collaboration opportunities into daily lessons during the 2023–2024 school year.
August 2, 2023	All teachers and administrators attend the collaborative learning professional development session.

August 7, 2023 +	Teachers are intentional about integrating collaborative learning opportunities into lesson plans. Administrators do fidelity checks to make sure students are allowed to work with peers during their official teacher observations and principal visits throughout the year.

Positive Parent Contact

Implementing positive parent contact will start when the faculty meets on August 1, 2023. Once started, positive parent contact will continue throughout the school year. Teachers will make positive contact with the parents or caregivers for each student at least one time per semester. See Table 8 for the Timeline for Positive Parent Contact.

Table 8

Timeline for Positive Parent Contact

Date	Action Item
August 1, 2023	Principal introduces the expectation for teachers to make positive parent contact in the form of a phone call, email, or written note for each of their students twice a year or once per semester.
August 3, 2023	During in-service, teachers have one hour to write a welcome note to each of the students who are assigned to their classes. Each teacher has five classes with 18 to 30 students on the roster.
August 7, 2023 +	Teachers use all or a portion of their planning time to complete their positive parent contact if they were not able to contact all parents during in-service; they may do so in lieu of the collaborative meeting time.
September 7, 2023	Teachers use their collaborative meeting time to make positive parent contact.
November 2, 2023	Teachers use their collaborative meeting time to make positive parent contact.
January 4, 2024	Teachers use their collaborative meeting time to make positive parent contact.

| March 7, 2024 | Teachers use their collaborative meeting time to make positive parent contact. |
| May 2, 2024 | Teachers use their collaborative meeting time to make positive parent contact. |

Parents Serving on Committees

Implementing the recommendation to invite parents to serve on committees will begin at the beginning of the school year in August 2023. It will take approximately two months to establish volunteer positions, which will remain in place throughout the 2023–2024 school year. See Table 9 for the Timeline for Parents Serving on Committees.

Table 9

Timeline for Parents to Serve on Committees

Date	Action Items
July 20, 2023	Administrators, teachers, parents and students in sixth grade, and new students attend the What to Expect In Middle School Night; volunteers are solicited to serve on various school committees.
August 1, 2023	Administrators, teachers, parents, and students attend the Welcome Back to School Night and solicit parent volunteers to join various school committees.
August 4, 2023	School committees meet to recommend possible parent volunteers. Teachers call and ask possible parents to volunteer on committees.
September 28, 2023 +	School committees with parent volunteers meet on a monthly basis, and teachers and parent volunteers work cooperatively to plan and implement activities. Schedules will vary based on member availability for each committee. This will be an ongoing process throughout the school year.
December 4, 2023	Administrators, teachers, and parent volunteers attend a parent volunteer appreciation dinner to celebrate parent volunteers.
May 9, 2024	Administrators, teachers, and parent volunteers attend a parent volunteer appreciation dinner to celebrate parent volunteers.

Scheduling Family Academic Work Sessions

The implementation of family academic work sessions will take approximately one month to plan. Planning and implementation will be an ongoing process in which the parent engagement committee will plan a family academic night, attend the event, and then meet to refine the event plans and prepare for the next event. See Table 10 for the Timeline for Scheduling Family Academic Work Sessions.

Table 10

Timeline for Scheduling Family Academic Work Sessions

Date	Action Item
August 4, 2023	The parent engagement committee meets to provide recommendations to fill all parent positions. Members of the committee call prospective parents asking them to volunteer.
August 15, 2023	The parent engagement committee meets to plan the first family academic activity work session.
August 31, 2023	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before progress reports are sent home.
September 7, 2023	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
October 16, 2023	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before report cards are sent home.
October 23, 2023	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
November 9, 2023	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before progress reports are sent home.
November 16, 2023	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
December 14, 2023	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, four days before the end of the second quarter.

January 4, 2024	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
February 8, 2024	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before progress reports are sent home.
February 15, 2024	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
March 21, 2024	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before report cards are sent home.
March 28, 2024	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
April 11, 2024	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before progress reports are sent home.
April 18, 2024	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and plan the next night.
May 16, 2024	Parents, students, administrators, and teachers attend the family work session, one week before report cards are sent home.
May 23, 2024	The parent engagement committee meets to discuss the family academic work session, make changes, and nominate new members to the committee for the following year.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide recommendations to improve the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School in Tennessee. The problem is that 83% of the teachers at Brighton Middle School cited students' low academic motivation as a problem in their classes. This chapter of the report presented the Recommendations, the Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders, Resources Needed, Timeline, and Summary. Five recommendations were made, including greater principal presence in classrooms, more student collaboration, the establishment of positive parent contacts made by teachers, the recruitment of parents to serve on committees, and the scheduling of family academic work sessions.

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Appendices

Appendix A

BRIGHTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
7785 Highway 51 South
Brighton, Tennessee 38011
Ph: (901) 840-9450
Fax: (901) 840-9475
http://bms.tipton-county.com/

Sherronda Alexander
Kevin Byrd
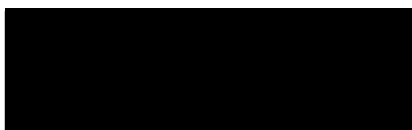Peggy Cousar

Alan Willey
PRINCIPAL

ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS

December 2, 2022

Dear Mrs. Moschitta,

After careful review of your research proposal entitled, Recommendations to Improve the Practice of Motivating Students at Brighton Middle School in Brighton, TN, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your research at Brighton Middle School.

Sincerely,

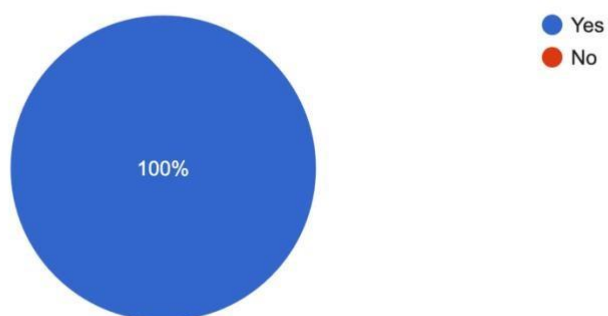Alan Willey

Principal

(901) 840-9450

Appendix B

BMS Teacher Survey Results on 2021–2022 Student Motivation

34 responses
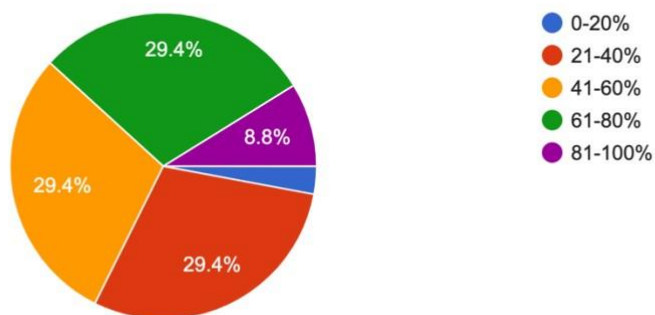
Was the lack of academic motivation a problem for students during the 2021-2022 school year?
34 responses

● Yes
● No

100%

Please select the percentage range shown below that you believe represents the percent of your students from the 2021-2022 school year who showed signs of a lack of academic motivation.
34 responses

● 0-20%
● 21-40%
● 41-60%
● 61-80%
● 81-100%

29.4%

8.8%

29.4%

29.4%

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the school climate at Brighton Middle School?

2. How does working with peers impact student motivation?

3. What do you think motivates students to achieve academically?

4. What do you think hinders student motivation?

5. What makes students feel like they belong at Brighton Middle School?

6. How does teacher behavior impact student motivation?

7. How can the principals at Brighton Middle School support students?

8. How do students at Brighton Middle School take personal responsibility for their motivation to succeed academically?

9. How does the climate at Brighton Middle School affect student motivation?

10. What other feedback or thoughts about ways to increase student motivation at Brighton Middle School could you add?

Appendix D

Parental Consent Letter

Dear Parents and Guardians,

      My name is Regina Moschitta, and I teach math intervention for grades sixth, seventh, and eighth. I am currently pursuing a doctorate in instruction and curriculum from Liberty University. My research topic is improving the practice of motivating students academically at Brighton Middle School. The data collection process for this research includes a student survey. Parental consent is required for students to participate. The survey will be given during Cardinal Time and should only take about 10 minutes. Pseudonyms will be used to protect all participants' identities, and all data collected will be stored electronically with password protection. The survey prompts are as follows:

1. Students feel like they belong at Brighton Middle School.
2. Brighton Middle School has a safe learning environment.
3. Students at Brighton Middle School believe in their ability to achieve academically.
4. Students at Brighton Middle School are motivated to complete daily assignments.
5. Students at Brighton Middle School enjoy meaningful relationships with their teachers.
6. All students have equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at Brighton Middle School.
7. Teachers at Brighton Middle School care about their students.
8. Teachers at Brighton Middle School give students the opportunity to work with peers in the academic setting.
9. The after-school tutoring program benefits a large number of students who need extra help at Brighton Middle School.
10. Administrators at Brighton Middle School follow the schoolwide rules and consequences.
11. Brighton Middle School has a positive school climate.

      Please sign and return the consent form, located on the back of this letter, if you are willing to give your child permission to participate in the research. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Regina Moschitta
Math Interventionist

Recommendations To Improve the Practice of Motivating Students Academically at Brighton

Middle School in Brighton, Tennessee

Please complete this form and return it to your child's homeroom teacher.

Please check one.

○ I give my child permission to complete the survey.

○ I do not give my child permission to complete the survey.

Student Name (Please print): _____

Student's Grade (Circle the grade level):   6   7   8

Student's Language Arts Teacher _____

Parent Name (Please print): _____

Parent Signature:_____

Appendix E

Survey

Demographic Questions

Instructions: Choose the best response for each question.

1. What is your ethnicity?

    White

    African American

    Native American/Pacific Islander

    Two or more ethnicities

    Other

2. What is your gender?

    Male

    Female

    Prefer not to answer

3. What is your grade level?

    6

    7

    8

Survey Prompts

Instructions: Choose one response for each prompt below.

1. Students feel like they belong at Brighton Middle School.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. Brighton Middle School has a safe learning environment.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. Students at Brighton Middle School believe in their ability to achieve academically.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. Students at Brighton Middle School are motivated to complete daily assignments.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. Students at Brighton Middle School enjoy meaningful relationships with their teachers.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. All students have equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at Brighton

   Middle School.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

7. Teachers at Brighton Middle School care about their students.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

8. Teachers at Brighton Middle School give students the opportunity to work with peers in the

   academic setting.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

9. The after-school tutoring program benefits a large number of students who need extra help at

Brighton Middle School.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

10. Administrators at Brighton Middle School follow the schoolwide rules and consequences.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

11. Brighton Middle School has a positive school climate.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Appendix F

Focus Group Questions

1. What factors contribute to low student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

2. How do administrators at Brighton Middle School promote student motivation?

3. How do discipline policies affect student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

4. What role do teachers play in motivating students at Brighton Middle School?

5. How can administrators support teachers as they work to motivate students to achieve academically?

6. How do peer relationships impact student motivation at Brighton Middle School?

7. How would you describe the school climate at Brighton Middle School?

8. Would you like to contribute any additional information that will help solve the problem of low student motivation at Brighton Middle School?