Case Study:

An Approach to Assess the Impact of the Student Success Program that Target Students in Poverty at a New England School

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November 5, 2022

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Graduate Education Programs
Southern New Hampshire University

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to my family, my husband, children, and parents, for their role in giving me the space and time needed to do this work. Thank you to my committee for their support of my work and their pressure to ensure it is done both well and in a timely manner.

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Kiara, Brooklyn, Leif and Trace. They have supported me in understanding the depths of my attempt to model the balancing act between fulfilling one’s own dreams and needs while loving and supporting the dreams and needs of one’s family.

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Abstract

Defining success is difficult due to the abstract nature of the term and the multiple, competing ideas of what success looks like. Therefore, assessing the impact of a program designed to increase student success in an independent, rural high school is murky. The purpose of this dissertation in practice is to understand what students determine as their own factors in their success. This positive deviance approach gives voices to students in the definition of success and allows the resulting suggestions to be implemented at the local level. This scholar-practitioner dissertation in practice uses a positive deviant lens to examine why some students from poverty perform well at a New England high school, with the goal of generalizing the successful findings to better serve future students living in poverty. Participant selection also used a positive deviant approach. Data analysis and interpretation was conducted from interviews, document review, and a teacher survey. The findings of this study indicate five traits of success in the participant: organization, perseverance, resiliency, empathy, and connections. Additionally, the findings indicate further research could be done in the areas of the role of special educators in the lives of students, the concept of *Goals, Habits, Growth* as a framework of success, and the relationship between helping others and personal success.

Section One: Introduction to Dissertation

Background

Generational poverty, when a family has been in poverty for multiple generations, as opposed to situational poverty, when a family is in poverty for only the current generation, often can indicate a wider array of problems. Today, as in the past, education is held up as the best escape route from poverty, as seen in studies over the decades (Gans, 1995; Holleb, 1972; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996; Myrdal, 1962). Those in poverty tend to come from families without a high level of formal education for generation after generation, and unless this cycle is broken through access to formal education, the cycle continues (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Breaking the cycle can have significant benefits for students in generational poverty. Students in generational poverty earn poorer grades at school (Jensen, 2009). Children in poverty have been shown to have a far more difficult path to educational achievement than their more affluent peers (Blanden & Gibbons, 2006). While for the past generation, more students from poverty are attending higher education institutions, (Carnevale & Fry, 2000), a low number of students who are the first of their families to attend college graduate from college. According to Warburton, Bugarin, and Nuñez (2001), there is a 15% gap between the 3-year persistence rates of first- and second-generation students (73% and 88%, respectively). The result of these studies taken together is a concern for how to break the cycle of generational poverty.

One approach to scholar-practitioner research into breaking the cycle of generational poverty is to focus on studying the success of students living in generational poverty. In studying the success of at-risk students, most studies have been hampered by a limited range of measures and the use of single items to measure the broad concept of success (Powell et al., 1990). Using the results of standardized tests is one accepted measurement (York et al., 2015). Standardized tests were first used in the United States during WWI to place soldiers based on intellect, ability and potential, and these same tests were adapted by educators to assess students' academic performance (Smyth, 2008). More recently, George W. Bush's 2002 *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* legislation focused heavily on standardized tests and data-driven decision making. This was followed by Barack Obama's *Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS)* in 2009, combined with the promise of competitive federal grants as part of the Race to the Top initiative (RTTT) by the U.S. Department of Education, also in 2009, which asks states to create standards and standardized assessments. Additionally, major international tests, such as the *PIRLS, TIMSS*, and *PISA* compare scores of students in different countries. Using standardized tests to define success of students living in poverty has become a widespread, acceptable definition of success.

However, there are problems with this definition of success. This focus in standardized tests has led the US to definitions of success based on what is assessed (York et al., 2015). In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education put out their report *A Nation at Risk (NAR)* and recommended assessing knowledge in English, math, science, social science and computer science. Bush's *NCLB* as well as Obama's *RTTT* initiatives measured English language arts, math, and science, thereby more narrowly defining success according to only a few academic subjects. As the federal government became more involved in education, the definition of success became more rigid, measurable and uniform (Turgut, 2013). However, there are problems with a rigid and uniform definition of success. The question of who defines success is an important one. A uniform and rigid definition is likely to reflect white, male, middle-class norms. These norms do not necessarily reflect the attitudes, values and beliefs of students living in generational poverty.

Statement of inquiry: Focus of Practice

Despite the odds against them, some students in generational poverty perform well in school (Krashen, 2005). Singhal and Svenkerud (2018) argue that evidence-based innovations are usually outside-in, expert-driven approaches that ignore or reject local solutions; instead, they claim, scholars should focus more on practice-based evidence and using the local communal wisdom to solve problems. One way to examine practical, local solutions is to focus on positive deviance (PD). Positive deviance is defined by Herrington and van de Fliert (2018) as "both a theoretical concept and a practical strategy for understanding honorable departures from the norm, and effecting positive social change" (p. 676). Positive deviants, or the individuals who honorably depart from the norm, find solutions in their own organizations, leading to the potential for more adopters of the solution, as well as a higher likelihood of the solution being sustained, all because they are generated locally.

Using a positive deviance method to assess the impact of a program targeting students living in poverty offers an opportunity to break the top-down, quick-fix methods often used to address issues stemming from poverty. Quick-fix methods can lead to frustrating adoption and abandon cycles of education. Using a local-based method addresses the underlying problems because, despite poverty being a barrier to education universally (Ladd, 2012), the most variance in student achievement is within, not between, schools (Adelson et al., 2016). Adelson et al.'s research (2016) indicates that improvements in education can often be found locally; some students in schools are performing well, some teachers in schools are better able to help students break out of cyclical poverty, and some programming within schools is better suited to encourage success than others. Adelson et al.'s work is based on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, which found that "80% of the variation between the pupils in their achievement lay within schools, fully four times as much as lay between them (20%)"

(Reynolds, 2010, p. 163). The positive deviance method recognizes the local expertise of successful students, teachers, leadership, and programs in that it examines current local successes.

The focus of practice for this study is to use a positive deviant lens to examine why some students from poverty perform well at a New England high school, with the goal of generalizing the successful findings to better serve future students living in poverty. This inside-out approach challenges the national narrative that relies on policy to correct all schools' failings because schools and districts cannot address these problems without external accountability. A body of research suggests that while the national policies are supposed to reduce racial and socioeconomic gaps in achievement, these reform efforts increase segregation and existing class and race inequalities (Brathwaite, 2017). While transferability of data from the bottom up is a more cumbersome process, a large collection of case studies in which a positive deviance approach is used could affect the national narrative and begin a process of looking within for success to decrease racial and socioeconomic gaps.

Potential contributions to practice and scholarship

Using a positive deviance approach allows this case study to focus on *why* the program is successful for some students, which can lead to suggestions for change in the program to find more success in the future. Studies that use only quantitative methods, not mixed or qualitative to research a program, are helpful in showing whether a program succeeded in reaching its goals (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001).

Many studies over the past 70 years have pointed out that students in poverty do not achieve at the same standard that students not in poverty achieve (Wrigley, 2012). According to Carter (2016), the solution most policymakers and educators focus on is high-quality schools for everyone. While this appears logical, those utilizing this type of schooling often have only used quantitative, rather than qualitative studies or mixed methods to advocate for their solution (Carter, 2016). Qualitative studies and quantitative studies have differing purposes. Qualitative studies are broader and more exploratory in nature, giving a detailed description of a research topic. Quantitative studies are more focused to classify and explain what is observed (Yilmaz, 2013). While quantitative research into schools is essential to understand what is occurring, according to Borbasi and Jackson (2012), qualitative research would also help give a fuller picture of the research topic. Qualitative research also allows for a deeper examination into the effects of social relationships between students' socio-economic status and achievement (Flick et al., 2004). Each school looks different, and these differing school environments force students and educators to behave in certain ways and to value some social capital above others. The result of this valuing of certain types of social capital is that the groups with the same social and cultural background as the educators are privileged, while those with different social and cultural backgrounds are marginalized. Therefore, the effects of social relationships in school environments should be considered when examining the relationship between students' socio-economic status and achievement, calling for a qualitative study.

Other studies of programs for students in poverty did not use positive deviant methodology and did not result in providing suggestions for improvement to programming (Dynarski et al., 2018; Fejarang-Herrera, 2020). The goals of these studies were to examine the outcomes of the programs and to determine whether the program was successful. For instance, Dynarski et al. (2018) examined the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program for low-income students from low scoring schools. These students were given scholarships to attend private schools. The outcomes examined included student achievement, satisfaction with schools, perceptions of school safety, and parental involvement in education. They found that the program had a statistically significant negative impact on math achievement after two years. However, since they used only quantitative methods, not mixed or qualitative, they were unable to ascertain why the program failed. Additionally, the researchers examined the students as a group instead of as individuals. While this fits with the goals of the DC Opportunity Scholarship study, and therefore is not a fault of the study, a different goal of what should to be changed about the program to find more success would lead to a different methodology and possibly a positive deviance approach.

Likewise, Fejarang-Herrera (2020) examined California's Concentration Grant, shedding light on the use of specificity around targets when dispensing money to schools. It was a quantitative study to see whether the concentration grant, which gives districts that enroll a high percentage of students who confront barriers to earning more money, is improving equity of staffing resources across high schools. Fejarang-Herrera (2020) found little evidence that this key desired result was achieved. The next step after determining that the grant has not had the desired effect is to also do a qualitative study to not only understand the *what*, but also the *why.*

This study uses a positive deviance approach to develop suggestions for changes to the program in order to find more success in the future. This study uses qualitative methods in a case study of a New England high school with a pragmatic approach of affecting change to programming.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to identify the teachable factors that create educational success for some students in poverty at the Student Success Program at a New England independent high school. The Student Success Program began in 2012 in anticipation of a significant increase in poverty rates at the high school, based on elementary student poverty rates. It primarily serves first-generation, college-bound high school students. Their mission is to develop a strength of character and purpose, alongside college and career readiness skills (“Student Success Program”, n.d.).

Teachable factors are factors that can be taught, as opposed to factors that cannot be taught. If it is within the power of a school to teach a skill or mindset, it is considered a teachable factor.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

Central question:

- What do students from the Student Success Program identify as the main factors of their success?

Sub Questions:

- What teachable factors create educational success in students in the Student Success Program?
- What attributes facilitate educational success for students in poverty in the Student Success Program?

Design of Research Study

Setting

This research is a case study of a New England independent secondary school's Student Success Program, a program designed to close the achievement gap between students living in poverty and those not living in poverty. New England has a history of independent schools that cross the public/private divide, due to the rural nature of the states. This independent school, like many across New England, acts as the local public school for thirteen towns. Over 90% of the student body comes from these thirteen towns and these students do not pay tuition (Burr and Burton Academy). The school is fully compliant with all special education laws. In these two ways, it is similar to a public school. It, however, can engage in more fundraising than public schools due to its independent status.

The school already collects quantitative data such as grade point averages (GPA) (weighted and unweighted), standardized test scores, and strength of schedule information, disaggregated by poverty status. 2018 SBAC data showed average percent growth for students in two areas, math and English language arts. The average percent growth, combining both math and ELA, for students on Free and Reduced lunch (FRL) was -.99 and .396% for non-FRL (M. Caraco, personal communication, May 15, 2019). Additionally, when comparing the simple GPA data (which is unweighted GPA scores) from 2017-2018 to the five years prior to the Student Success Program (2007-2011) and comparing the mean of students on FRL versus the total, the scores were as follows: 2017-2018 mean total comparison was -.4920; 2007-2011 mean total comparison was -.2582 (M. Caraco, personal communication, February 27, 2019). While the school-collected quantitative data suggests that there is not an academic benefit to the program, many students, parents, faculty and staff think highly of the program (M. Tashjian, personal communication, February 27, 2020), and certain students are held up as examples of the program's success (J. Pergament, personal communication, October 26, 2021). There is reputational success. There is a sense from the faculty and administration that the "correct" data is not being collected that shows the success of the program (M. Tashjian, personal communication, February 27, 2020). The head of school states that numbers are only a small piece of the puzzle, but that everyone knows the program is successful (M. Tashjian, personal communication, February 27, 2020).

One reason knowing what data to collect is difficult is because the purposes of the program are broad. It has a specific audience, but its mission to develop college and career readiness skills, strength of character, and a sense of purpose that will propel students toward a lifetime of success (“Student Success Program”, n.d.) is less trackable. Indicators of success have been established (“Student Success Program”, n.d.):

- Confidence
- Academic proficiency and appreciation for the value of education
- Transferable skills, including collaboration
- Mindset of perseverance and optimism
- Self-control, Self-worth and Joy
- Establishment of a future vision to work toward
- The ability to effectively navigate resources
- Professionalism and knowledge of “Hidden Rules”
- Healthy relationships with adults and peers

The indicators were established through a collaborative process in the administrative team, which includes the director of the program. The indicators are tracked through data collection and this process are discussed more thoroughly in section two, along with how the tracking of data defines the meaning of the indicators for the program. Certain students exiting from this four-year program are held up as shining examples of the success of this program. Therefore, it is a good case study setting for understanding positive deviance in an educational program. This research is not an evaluation of the program. Instead, this research explores the experiences of positive deviants from the program to see what teachable traits they have that led to their success. If the student success stories are the proof of success, the successful students should be studied after exiting the program.

Case Study Selection

A case study method is appropriate in this case following Yin’s (2018) suggestion because the main research question is a “why” question, there is little to no control over behavioral events, and the focus of the study is contemporary. The research question is, “Why do some students in poverty realize educational success in the Student Success Program?”, which is ideal for a case study (Yin, 2018). This case study wishes to illuminate a set of decisions by the school program (which traits to teach) and what the results of these decisions are. The Student Success Program, whose participants are being studied, continues today, making it a contemporary study, however the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated, thereby fulfilling all of Yin’s (2018) requirements for a case study.

According to Yin’s (2018) definition of a case study, the contemporary case must be investigated in depth and within real-world context and copes with many more variables of interest than data points. This case study assumes that the understanding that resulting from this study will involve important contextual conditions pertinent to the New England School, which is essential to a case study (Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) also identifies several tactics for dealing with the four tests of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. The reliability of the case study is grounded in using a semi-structured protocol based on Creswell’s 2018 interview protocol and is explained further in the section on ‘measures/data collection’.

Construct validity requires multiple sources of evidence, according to Yin (2018). In this case, archival records of the Student Success Program at the New England School are used. They are stable, unobtrusive, specific, and cover multiple years of events. They can additionally be quantified, if needed. Interviews of participants also are used to target the specific students chosen to be interviewed. The process for choosing participants is outlined below. The interviews provide explanations and personal views.

External validity, according to Yin (2018), should use theory in a single-case study like this, in order to show whether and how the case study's findings can be generalized. In this case the working theory is that this case study shows which teachable traits lead to academic success living in poverty. While this does blind the researcher (Yin, 2018) to non-teachable traits that may or may not have a greater impact on academic performance, the knowledge of the non-teachable traits is less helpful to schools in designing programming and support. Pattern matching, an example of internal validity, is used. Yin (2018) suggests comparing an empirically based pattern, such as the results of the findings of this study, with a predicted one, such as the prediction that relationship building has the greatest impact on academic success of students living in poverty. This prediction is based on the belief of the school in question that relationship building is an integral piece of the Student Success Program ("Student Success Program", n.d.). The rival explanations to this prediction are that there are specific skills that can be taught that have a greater impact on the academic success of students in poverty OR that there are specific mindsets, such as a growth mindset, that have a greater impact on academic success of students in poverty. All three explanations, the predicted one and the two rival explanations, are examined using pattern matching to strengthen internal validity.

Selection of participants

Positive deviants must be in the minority relative to their reference group. In this case, the reference group is students living in poverty, as defined by their free and reduced (F/R) lunch status and/or family income level if the family does not choose to apply for the F/R lunch. Additionally, during COVID the state has offered free lunch to all students, so any students identified since the 2020-2021 school year should be based on family income level instead of F/R lunch status.

All students interviewed have graduated from Burr and Burton Academy, been part of the Student Success program for all four years of high school, lived in poverty during the entirety of their high school careers, and be at least 18 years old. To be chosen as a participant, students must have been identified as living in poverty during their four years of high school and their family must have been living in generational poverty for at least two generations. That is the reference group. Within this reference group, positive deviants are chosen based on a number of factors: grades, strength of schedule, college or career readiness, and commitment to the school community, as seen through participation in a wide variety of activities. Additionally, the students must be 18 years or older and have been part of the Student Success Program for all four years of high school. Eight participants were selected and saturation was met.

The researcher selected participants based on a spreadsheet of information about students with all identifying information removed for privacy reasons. The spreadsheet includes GPA, both weighted and unweighted according to their strength of schedule, ACE, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, score, and a key engagement total based on how active they were in the Student Success Program’s many activities, classes, and camps. Once approximately 25 students are chosen from this spreadsheet, the randomized numbers identifying each student were reported to the head of the Student Success Program. He contacted the students and asked them if they were willing to participate. The researcher only received the names of the students who agreed to participate, and the researcher does not know which student is identified with which randomized identification number. The purpose of this setup is to protect the privacy of the students.

One of the challenges in defining positive deviance is specifying whose norms are being departed from. In this case, the norms departed from are the norms of the referent group, students in poverty. The definition of positive in this case is a value judgment, as is all labeling of this kind. According to Ruggeri and Folke (2020), positive deviants should be identified by origins, such as poverty status, and outcomes, such as a diverse group of standards, such as GPA (weighted and unweighted), strength of schedule (Non-college Preparatory, College Preparatory, or Advanced Placement), and standardized test scores, as none of the standards alone fully fall under the category of honorable. Ruggeri and Folke (2020) argue that multiple indicators should be used, stating that "an operationalization that emphasizes both sustainability and multidimensionality in this way will be robust to edge cases and false positives" (p. 20). In each of these categories, the goal is not simply moving from a lower score to a higher score, but instead a move to a sustainable, higher level than their starting point. In order to judge sustainability, observations should be made over time (Ruggeri & Folke, 2020). The specific timeline criteria used by this study is defined as the four years of high school.

There is a minor contradiction in positive deviance that should be addressed here: in order to identify true positive deviance, there should be observed a sustained change over time, however it is possible for positive deviance to occur in small moments or single behaviors (Ruggeri & Folke, 2020). Therefore, this study can only be a small piece of a larger puzzle that includes further studies within the same setting, for more longitudinal data, particularly after recommendations have been implemented based upon this study's suggestions, and collaborative studies in alternative settings. Alternative settings do not expand the scope of positive deviance over time, but across place, an equally important consideration.

Data Collection Tools:

Measures/Data:

This study uses a positive deviant approach to choose the participants for the interviews. In choosing to interview Student Success participants, only those who have shown academic success were interviewed. Several sub questions emerge to help choose the positive deviants.

- What is the unweighted GPA of students living in poverty at the target school during their four years of high school?
- What is the weighted GPA of students living in poverty at the target school during their four years of high school?
- What is the strength of schedule of students living in poverty at the target school during their four years of high school?
- What is the standardized testing score of students living in poverty at the target school during their four years of high school?

The above data is already collected by the school. Participants were chosen from an examination of the data to find which New England high school students who were part of the Student Success Program and were students on Free and Reduced lunch or its equivalent, had significantly higher scores than others fitting the same profile in three of the four questions above. While a minimum of five interviewees is necessary for a case study, eight participants were interviewed in order to meet saturation.

Approximately 15 students were originally contacted by the researcher and asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview with the researcher (see Appendix A). Informed consent (Appendix B) was signed before any interviews took place.

An interview with each of the subjects who consent to be interviewed occurred. All participants preferred online interviews. All interviews used a semi-structured protocol based on Creswell's 2018 interview protocol. The questions began with asking background information to sets the interviewee at ease and gave the interviewer an opening to ask connecting questions later (See Interview Starting Questions, Appendix C). The content questions were the sub-questions of the study, with user-friendly phrasing. The content interview questions were graphically organized alongside the sub-questions of the study to ensure the central question was answered.

Probing was used frequently. Interviews were recorded, and notes were taken during the interview to capture ideas for follow-up questions or non-verbal communication.

Participants' participation is kept confidential. The participants' interview responses are recorded as a number, not a name. A master list of names and codes are kept in a secure location on the researcher's computer as a word document that is not shared via email or the internet. Audio recordings are also located in the same secure location as the master list, titled with the individual number, not name of participant. In the publication of this dissertation, no names of participants are mentioned. At the publication of the study, all audio recordings, the master list, and all research materials will be destroyed. The data collected will never be shared with any other researcher beyond what is publicly published.

Proposed Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the data collection. Also, coding was done by hand. The process for data analysis began with transcribing interviews and reading them over individually. Notes in margins about general ideas or tones of ideas were recorded.

This data was coded first using In Vivo coding and then Focused coding to complete the first cycle coding. Additionally, Pattern coding was used for second cycle coding. The codes for each individual were examined inductively to establish themes. Codes were categorized and outlined. One way the codes were categorized were through expected themes and surprising themes to represent diverse perspectives. Major themes were examined until interviews were at a saturation level.

Data was examined inductively first to establish a list of themes, then examined deductively to ensure all evidence for each theme was categorized. The goal of the individual interviews was to identify words, phrases and patterns. Credibility was established through member checks and deviate case analysis. Transferability of the data will be discussed in a later chapter, but the method for examining transferability is through thick description after all data has been collected and coded. Additionally, an audit trail was established for confirmability reasons.

Assumptions and Delimitations

In 2011 the researcher wrote, and received, a sabbatical grant to study the current achievement gap at the high school where this study is conducted (Larson, 2012). The answer to her research question, “Is there an achievement gap between students living in poverty and those not living in poverty?”, guided the program changes she recommended to the Board of Trustees. She spent one semester gathering quantitative data that already existed, as well as conducting interviews with students living in poverty to add qualitative data. The primary difficulty was in figuring out what was meant by achievement. The data collected included traditional measures, such as GPA and course difficulty, as well as participation in extracurricular activities. The finding was that the school did not have a “participation gap” (Whitty, 2016, p. 2), but did have a GPA gap. A summary of these findings and a proposal of next steps was submitted to the Board of Trustees. Most of the proposed solutions were acted upon within the next year, including: a year-long Humanities course that would provide more relationship building for students reading below the fifth grade reading level when they entered high school, as well as a narrower focus on the skills of reading and writing; doubling the math class time for students entering high school below the level of Algebra I; establishment of the Student Success Program, including an administrator whose sole job was to advocate for students living in poverty; and a summer Success Camp for students entering 9th grade who were flagged as at risk by their 8th grade teachers. Nine years later, the researcher ran a data team that examined the data collected in

2011 to the data in the previous three years to answer the research question, “Has the changes made since 2012 increased the achievement of students living in poverty?”

In the study of both the achievement gap and the Student Success program at the high school, the researcher’s worldview was pragmatic. The goal of this dissertation is to affect change at the local level that could influence others to conduct similar case studies that may, taken as a whole, lead to alternative methods of evaluation of educational programming.

One limitation to the pragmatic approach is a disregard for any factors that contribute to educational success that cannot be taught. The inquiry questions specifically ask for teachable factors that lead to success, thereby ignoring factors that are outside of the control of schools.

Another limitation to the structure of the study is that in order to choose the participants of the study, traditional methods are used. Since there are not widely accepted alternative methods of evaluating programming this study uses what schools value for success, grades, GPAs, and standardized testing.

The researcher’s biases also play a role in this study, as she chose a method of study, positive deviance, that will only result in identifying factors of success, not failure. This method was chosen in part because it helped eliminate any outside pressure from influencing data analysis, as the final identifications can only be positive and thereby accepted by the school administration. Ironically, the very act of choosing a method that would eliminate outside pressure is a biased act.

Finally, the researcher is the original visionary of the Student Success Program. While she no longer works at the school where the program exists, giving her a degree of separation from the politics of the school, she does want the program to be successful and that bias also plays into the structure of this study as a positive deviant case study.

Definition of Key Terms

Equity

Educational equity should not merely be inclusivity, but the result should be a true belonging of marginalized students and families through access, opportunities and outcomes (Calabrese Barton and Tan, 2020).

Teachable Factors

Factors that can be taught are separated from factors that cannot be taught in this research to be pragmatic. If it is within the power of a school to teach a skill or mindset, it is considered a teachable factor.

Alternative evaluation

Alternative evaluation of educational programming refers to any type of evaluation that is not based on grades, GPA, graduation rate, or standardized test scores, which are the traditional means of evaluation of educational programming.

Positive Deviance

For the purposes of this research, the definition of deviance is "any type of behavior or condition that exceeds the normative standards or achieves an idealized standard and that evokes a collective response of a positive type" (Heckert & Heckert, 2002, p. 466).

Poverty

Poverty here is defined through the nationally recognized Free and Reduced lunch program. If students qualify for free or reduced lunch, they are considered to be living in poverty in this paper. Note that a student does not have to have applied for Free and Reduced lunch. If a family income level would qualify them for free and reduced lunch, even if the family does not apply, the student is considered to be living in poverty. Additionally, due to lunch being free to all students in the state during COVID, the standard of qualifying at the pre-established, national level for free and reduced lunch continues to be the qualifying criterion.

Educational Success

For the purposes of this study, educational success is based on high school GPA, both weighted and unweighted, strength of schedule, such as non-college preparatory, college preparatory, or advance placement, and standardized test scores. While one goal of this study is to identify alternative assessment methods of educational programming, those methods are not yet widely acknowledged. Therefore, this study uses what schools value for success.

Generational Poverty

Generational poverty is when a family has lived in poverty for at least two generations.

Significance of the Inquiry:

Scholarship: Why a Positive Deviance approach?

Positive deviance has not been widely studied generally or within social and psychological sciences. Lewis and Yates (2019) posit that this may be because most studies into inequities and public policy focus on group differences such as gender gaps in wages or uneven funding of educational systems based on race/income. Ruggeri and Folke (2020) argue that these types of studies look to understand the impact on the population of inequitable systems. However, they miss learning from those who were able to flourish despite the inequitable system, which is what positive deviance can provide. Positive deviance does more than "minimize the effects of bad policies; it looks to replace bad policies outright" (Ruggeri & Folke, 2020, pg. 9). Since positive deviance has been under-utilized, Ruggeri and Folke (2020) argue that there is untapped potential to integrate empirically validated behavioral policy interventions in the area of inequity.

Using extreme cases to generate new ideas can "expose overlooked causal factors" and "discourage overgeneralization" (Starbuck, 2006, pg. 149)). Starbuck (2006) suggests that the organizational dynamics of extreme situations are comparatively exaggerated relative to less extreme cases, allowing actions and routines to come to light that may be the cause of the extreme. Starbuck is not alone in this belief. Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorenson (2009) echo Starbuck in valuing "extreme, deviant (in a statistical sense) or unique case sampling" (p. 430), and Ary et al. (2009) give examples of studying positive deviance in school settings to identify practices, teaching methods, or student characteristics that may be relevant to strong test scores. Previous educational research into positive deviance or related concepts (such as invulnerable children, positive cases, or resiliency) also suggest the use of extreme cases to determine relevant practices, methods, or characteristics (Howard et al., 1999).

Practice: Why a Positive Deviance Approach?

Since a positive deviance approach gives suggestions as to *why* a program is successful, it is useful in this case study, as it is studying a program that the secondary school deems as successful. The purpose of this study is not to determine whether the school's evaluation of the program as successful is correct or not, but to instead examine why certain students are successful. The school is interested to know why the program has had success in order to then determine which data points to use for future evaluation purposes. For instance, if it is found that a particular practice or method is relevant to the success of the program, those same practices or methods can be tracked and more widely shared, both in the school and in other schools and communities. The axiological benefit of positive deviance stands in its ability to make obvious values associated with the research. Axiology focuses on what *could be* and what *should be*, rather than what *is* (Thomas, 1993). By focusing on the values and motivations of the researcher, such as the choice of how to define success in education and therefore the choice of positive deviance, the scholarly community can more readily debate whether these values are worthwhile.

Given the goal of adapting the learning and the positive deviance process, the strategies focused on should filter out resources that may not be widely available. This is what Lavine (2012) refers to as passing each success factor through a "*conceptual sieve"* (p. 1019). However, although interventions may only be effective in specific contexts (Gangl et al. 2020), this does not erase their value. It merely narrows their portability. Therefore, if in this context it is found that additional funding leads to an increase in achievement, the program should not discredit funding as a means to achieve equity just because not all schools have access to the same level of funding. These results could inform policy in a critical way, even if other schools could not immediately act on the findings.

Additionally, positive deviance is chosen for this case study due to its additional benefit of being part of an inquiry-based process that leads staff to feel a sense of ownership in identifying the process. Miller (2009) identified positive deviance intervention as a key component of ensuring medical personnel followed a new method to decrease the spread of MRSA that included the staff examining data and visiting the site of the practices they decided were doing the best job. Since the staff was able to "discover" these methods on their own, instead of being sent a memo with the new methods, they had more buy-in and therefore were better able to emulate the success.

Due to both the "*conceptual sieve"* and "*discovery process"* (Lavine, 2012, p. 1019), positive deviance differs from a best practices approach. Best practices imported from foreign contexts tend to be told to people to perform using a top-down approach. They are well researched but can lack the ownership necessary to be well executed. Positive deviance can overcome skepticism, ego-defense, or the fear of being criticized for prior failures. Positive deviance can overcome resistance, which helps amplify success; it is indigenous to the system and, at the same time, adaptive. Brown and Wyatt (2010) argue that positive deviance replication is considered an adaptive customization process similar to a well-executed design process.

Using positive deviants as exemplars in a case study, so long as the exemplars share significantly similar backgrounds as the target audience, can improve the effectiveness of current programming, particularly when coupled with an appealing outcome, according to Salisbury and Zhao (2020). To summarize, positive deviance provides a fruitful way to study the psychology of reducing inequality.

Scholarship: Why a case study method?

Case study researchers show that single case studies can provide enough material to learn from (Bisel et al., 2020). Flyvbjerg (2006) attested that case study is especially helpful to support the development of a deep dive into a local context. Additionally, case studies can challenge current scholarly assumptions and theory (Bisel et al., 2014). In this way, a case study that selects to investigate positive deviance can both complement and contribute to other types of studies (Bisel et al., 2020).

Practice: Case Study

The analysis of exemplary craft practice, such as positive deviant case studies, can contribute to organizational scholarship through the possibility of new insights (Bisel et al., 2020). It is the accumulation of case studies over time, place and situation that leads to new theories. Supplementing the body of knowledge with case studies of individuals, teams and organizations can both complicate and round out organizational theory.

Moore (2017) studied the lived experiences of positive deviance and found that a strong connection to the organization must be present. Cheang and Goh (2018) examined positive deviance in Singapore using positive deviance methodology, audio-diary and interview data to examine why some low-income students scored above 70% in school testing. They found that these positive deviants were connected within their family, aware of their family circumstances, and were actively engaged in ways to succeed despite financial limits. These case studies give some indication of how to use positive deviance to direct a program to improve its work.

Summary of the Inquiry

Ruggeri and Folke (2020) argue that the next step towards advancing research on positive deviance is to better understand what is associated with the outcomes of interest. Haushofer and Fehr (2014) overview the depth and breadth of literature on the psychological consequences of poverty and inequality, however further research is needed to understand influences deviance.

Bradley et al.'s (2009) four step process for studying positive deviance in the behavioral sciences include: (1) identifying positive deviants, (2) studying positive deviants, (3) testing interventions based on lessons from positive deviants and (4) testing the generalizability of the interventions. This body of research focuses on steps one and two, with the purpose of implementing step three as a result of the findings. Ruggeri and Folke (2020) suggest that when researchers have a working hypothesis about how positive deviants found success, this work should be used to encourage others to do the same. The discussion section of this research proposes such interventions.

A positive deviance approach begins with a dilemma. Lavine (2012) discusses the nuanced differences between positive deviance and appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry poses affirming questions that are designed to provoke and guide change. This is an asset-based organizational development method, as is positive deviance, and they both rely on both identifying and cultivating latent strength within a system. However, positive deviance and appreciative inquiry differ. Positive deviance uses strengths to solve problems, therefore the starting point for positive deviance is always based upon a problem. Usually this problem is an intractable one. In opposition, appreciative inquiry is known for using strength as a starting point, not starting with a problem. Appreciative inquiry does not assume things are broken; appreciative inquiry aims to make good, better. In addition, positive deviance and appreciative inquiry have differing approaches. Appreciative inquiry allows the space to imagine a better system. Positive inquiry requires observable behavior. Appreciative inquiry is more suited to large-scale change, while positive deviance always specifically adapts to the context of the community and organization being studied. The issue of addressing generational poverty through education is an intractable problem found throughout the world and throughout history, making it suited for positive deviance. Additionally, the case study approach used in this secondary, independent school in rural New England also compliments positive deviance, as it is more concrete and targeted than appreciative inquiry.

Section 2: Organizational Analysis

Introduction

History of the Organization

This New England independent high school has a public mission, meaning over a dozen surrounding towns pay the tuition for students from their town to go to the school. Additionally, other students can pay tuition or receive financial aid to attend the school. It acts as the public high school for these towns. The school has been coeducational and non-religious for decades, but it began in the early 1800s as a men's seminary school.

The school serves grades 9-12 and has a student body of approximately 800 students, 10% of which are international students. (Burr and Burton Academy) The faculty student ratio is 10/1. (Burr and Burton Academy) 90-95% of students are college-bound (Burr and Burton Academy). High school graduation rate is virtually 100% (Burr and Burton Academy, CauseIQ). The University Acceptance rate is 100% (school recruitment document). The average SAT score is 100-150 points higher than the national average (Burr and Burton Academy). Roughly 25% of the student body was signed up for free and reduced lunch pre-pandemic, although all students currently receive free breakfast and lunch (Burr and Burton Academy, CauseIQ). The school is accredited by the state Agency of Education and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (Burr and Burton Academy).

The school looks more like a college campus than a traditional high school, with nine buildings on campus and three satellite campuses, encompassing over 150 acres of land (Burr and Burton Academy). The land itself is important to the school, cited in multiple sections of the school website, Facebook page, and in recruitment documents. Two of the school's main programs are focused on the environment. One offers place-based, experiential environmental studies and the other is a hands-on study of sustainable agriculture and food systems. The school has won the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence. (Burr and Burton Academy) 'Unique' is frequently used on the Burr and Burton Academy to refer to the "sense of place" (Burr and Burton Academy).

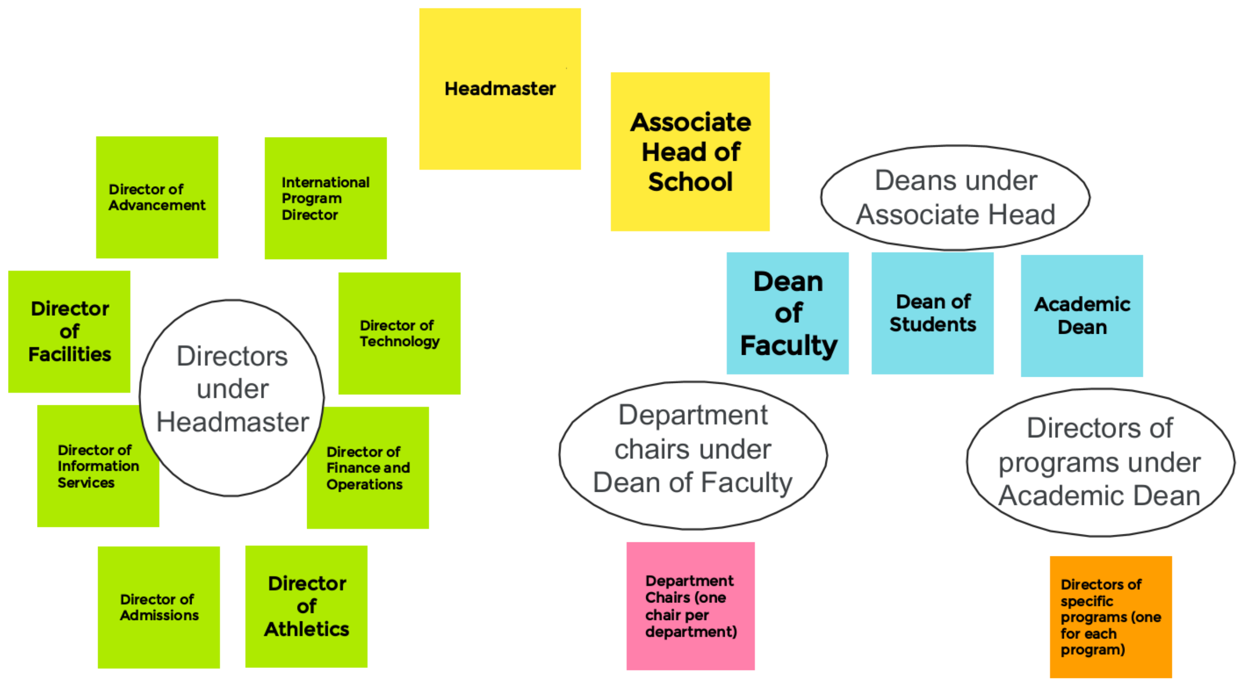
Over 85% of students participate in after-school activities and there are 115 leadership positions for students throughout the school (Burr and Burton Academy), and a school leadership program open to all students (Burr and Burton Academy, Facebook).

The school's publications, both virtual and physical, bring up certain phrases consistently. 'Tradition' is frequently used, although not with any clear or specific traditions in mind. The term instead appears to be referring to the age of the school, its "long history" (Burr and Burton Academy). Several words related to relationships also frequent the school's publications, such as "supportive, caring environment", "caring community", "depth of relationships formed between students and faculty", and "nurture a culture" (Burr and Burton Academy).

The structure of the school combines a top-down approach with significant ability for independent decision making. Below is an image of the school leadership. The headmaster is in charge; however, he leaves most of the running of the education of students to the associate head of school, who oversees the deans, department chairs, and student programs. The headmaster controls all external aspects of the school, which is considerably more than the average public school since the school runs on a combination of school fees and donations. One job of the headmaster, who has always been male, is to frame the activities of the school to gain further donations.

Figure 1

The School Structure



The Student Success Program is one example of a specific program at this New England school to serve first-generation, college-bound students. Since this research examines students having gone through this program, its organization is also relevant. The program began in 2012 and has had the same director since that point. This program has a director and an assistant director, although the assistant director position was only created in 2020. The mission of the program is for students to “develop college and career readiness skills, strength of character, and a sense of purpose that will propel them into a lifetime of success” (“Student Success Program”, n.d.). This mission, along with the program goals and indicators of success, was written by the director with the assistance of the academic dean. The program goals are:

1. Scholars will become self-reliant; they will have a strong sense of financial and social independence.
2. Scholars will effectively navigate relationships and resources, with the goal of ultimately contributing positively to the greater good of the Burr and Burton community and society as a whole.
3. Scholars will develop a sense of self-worth through the process of setting and realizing personal and professional goals. ("Student Success Program", n.d).

The Success Program has three main components. First, two courses are offered, a Prep for Success Class offered during the student's ninth grade year to help students learn the soft skills needed to succeed in high school, and an Introduction to College and Careers course that can be taken during 11th or 12th grade and is co-taught with a professor from a local college. This later course helps students go through the process of deciding what to do after high school, choosing what colleges or trade schools to apply to, and applying to both the colleges and for financial aid. ("Student Success Program", n.d.)

Secondly, a summer camp is run during the summer between 8th and 9th grade years. It is a three-week, free camp and students must be eligible for the camp through falling under at least two categories the program has developed, such as living in poverty, first-generation college-bound, etc. ("Student Success Program", n.d.). The camp is designed to give an advantage to the students who attend, as they complete their summer assignments for school with assistance from teachers, most 9th grade teachers work at the camp so relationship building occurs, students get issued a school iPad to use for the school year, students learn the campus and how to find all of their classes before the first day of school, and community building occurs through the team-building games that are built in daily. Additionally, the campers visit local colleges and trade schools, instilling an early vision of what opportunities they are working towards. This camp allows the students to “enter high school with confidence” (Student Success Program, n.d.).

Finally, there is an end of year trip for students who have actively contributed to the school community through “demonstrating consistently high engagement” as well as opportunities for scholarships for summer internships, allowing students who need to financially support their families to also pursue jobs or internships that can help them in their career choice or on their college applications (Student Success Program, n.d.). The end of year trip expands students’ worldviews, as the trip is often to another culture they are not accustomed to.

Organizational Analysis

Bolman and Deal (originally published in 1991; now in its 6th edition - 2017) collected previous organizational and leadership theories and combined them into four frames through which one might view an organization or a leader. Earlier researchers include Allison, 1971; Elmore, 1978; Morgan, 1986; Perrow, 1986; Quinn, 1988; and Scott, 1981 (as cited by Bolman & Deal, 2017). These four frames are structural, human resource, political and symbolic. The applications of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) frames for institutional analysis are numerous, including community college administration (Sypawka et al., 2010) and school leadership (Bonsen, 2003; McFadden et al., 2009; Roddy, 2010). As these authors recognize the validity of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) multiple-frame approach (Moen, 2017), this research also relies on the Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four frames for organizational analysis. While reviewers vary on the Bolman and Deal (2017) approach, it is used here because it strikes a “workable and illuminating balance between theory and practice” (Scarselletta, 1994, p. 342).

The Structural Frame

The structural frame incorporates several processes that allows organizations to run smoothly, and the key concepts include rules, roles, goals, policies and environment. This frame views organizations as rational systems: when a change is implemented in a predictable way, the organization can adapt to the ever-evolving conditions around it. (Graetz & Smith, 2010). A quintessential example of this was referred to by Callahan (1962) in what he called a "Tragedy in American Education". Callahan (1962) argued that education had adapted the 'cult of efficiency' method because educational needs were less important than business considerations, administrators were businesspeople, educational practices were labeled as scientific when they were not, and there was an anti-intellectual climate fostered among educators.

At this New England School there is a board of trustees with seventeen members. (Burr and Burton Academy) While many other schools' political structures include the tug between the school board and the teachers, the school board believes its job is to remain 30,000 feet up and to examine the 5-10 year trajectory of the school instead of day to day or year to year operations. The school board members are not publicly voted onto the board, but instead are asked to join.

The school mission is to "educate students intellectually and morally for a life of responsibility, integrity and service". (Burr and Burton Academy) Additional, the school has developed core values of:

- Engaging, vigorous educational experiences in academics, athletics and the arts;
- Respect for individual differences;
- The highest standards of performance and behavior;
- A mindset of perseverance and reflection;
- A supportive and caring community. (Burr and Burton Academy)

Much of the structural framework at this school is embodied in the board of trustees. The board handles financial planning, including a large endowment. The amount of the endowment is not public knowledge, but gifts are not accepted under $25,000. In 2018, the school was gifted $20 million by a single donor. A total of $1.08 million was given in 2019-2020 (2019-2020 Annual Appreciation Report). It is the job of the school board to plan strategies to meet objectives and coordinate the resources for the objectives to be met. The goal setting for the school is done by the school board, along with the administration. These goals are then communicated to staff at the annual staff meeting. These are typically five-year goals, and each annual staff meeting gives an update on these goals.

Communication of facts and information from the school board goes through the headmaster at either the annual staff meeting or monthly faculty meetings. Information is not collected from faculty and staff and given to the board of trustees, rather information comes from the board to the staff. This fits with the structural frame, as there is a clear and efficient hierarchy around information sharing. However, this information is all from the 50,000-foot level, not the daily, monthly, or even yearly decisions. The board of trustees stays out of those decisions. While much of those decisions are made through an open process, falling under the human resources frame, the communication of deadlines and responsibilities occurs through a regular email from the assistant head of school. (M. Kenny, personal communication, May 19, 2021)

One example of how the board of trustees works is seen through teacher pay. About five years ago the school board changed their pay scale for teachers with the goal of hiring the best new teachers, as well as encouraging veteran staff to retire early. The pay scale increased the starting pay for teachers and stopped pay step increases for teachers with over twenty years of service. This was a primary goal of the school board in their negotiations with the teacher union

(N. Strain, personal communication, March 5, 2021). Other economic incentives, a primary motivational tool for the structural frame, includes a teacher sabbatical with a $100,000 spending limit for one teacher a year and teacher grants of $3000-$5000 each for three teachers a year. Additionally, two teachers per year are given an award for innovation and excellence with $5000 for each to use for professional development. (M. Tashjian, personal communication, April 9, 2021)

This New England high school relies on tradition as a central concept, avoiding the shiny object syndrome (Fullan, 2018), as they, however, also remain mired in past practices. Roles and responsibilities are not often realigned to fit tasks and the environment. However, when realignment does occur, it is more often through grassroots, teacher initiatives. The Student Success Program for first-generation, college-bound students is an example of realignment to fit a changing environment. In 2011, this high school had a free and reduced lunch rate of approximately 25%. However, the local elementary school was seeing their levels of students on free and reduced lunch increase significantly, so much so that the K-2 grades had levels of 50% (personal communication). A plan to address this was brought to the administration and school board by a teacher, resulting in the Student Success Program. Besides the program itself, which is discussed earlier, there was a change to core classes to address the academic challenges that were increasing. A small group of students were entering the high school without pre-Algebra as a base. These students were not graduating after four years with Algebra II, a common prerequisite for college. The school doubled up the math requirements freshman year for these students, essentially catching them up to their peers by the end of their freshman year. While in 2011 there was only one class needed for this group of students, currently three classes are run with the doubled math requirement, showing that the school was anticipating needs.

Additionally, a course was designed for students reading below the fifth-grade level by the time they reached their freshman year of high school. There was not room in their schedule to fit both a doubling of math and a doubling of reading, as many students fell into both categories, so instead there was a commitment to doubling the teaching of reading. Class size and length of the course remained the same for this group of students, but a second teacher was added, reducing the student/teacher ratio to less than 10:1. The result was an increase in reading by 1.5 grade levels and an increase in writing by 2 grade levels for their freshman year. While originally there were less than 12 students qualifying for this course, in the past four years there has been a need to offer two of these courses in order to keep the student/teacher ratio to less than 10:1 (R. Urbanski, personal communication, May 3, 2019). These are examples of structural changes made by the school to address a changing environment.

The barriers to change from the perspective of the structural frame relate to a loss of clarity and stability (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In examining this barrier, the structure of the school is quite consistent, giving a sense of stability. The current headmaster has been in his position for fourteen years, while the previous headmaster had been in his position for fifteen years. This consistency is deliberate, using economic incentives to keep individuals in the position. Administration generally stays in their positions for many years, giving both a clarity of roles and a comfort in stability. The downside to this is that change occurs slowly. When the state instituted a move to proficiency-based graduation requirements in 2014, this school, being independent, did not make the transition. Instead, the school decided to learn from the mistakes of other schools. In 2022, the school has still not made the transition, although it has worked for three years towards this goal through professional development. Slow change is the downside to a consistent structural frame.

The Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame views organizations through employee relationships both within and to the organization. Bolman and Deal (2017) identified core assumptions within this frame: organizations exist to serve the needs of people; people and organizations need each other; and when the fit between organizations and people is poor one or both will suffer.

When this New England school received a $20 million grant for a new building, the planning of the building promoted participation. It began with a large forum to generate ideas of what the building should be. A wide range of ideas resulted and were collected and sorted by the administration. Using these ideas, the administration revealed that the building would be for the humanities and would also house the library. Following this announcement, departments were consulted, the humanities department about the new building and the math and science departments about their expansion into the current building. These departments discussed what they would like to see in their buildings to help promote education and community (M. Kenny, personal communication, March 1, 2021). These ideas were given to the architect to incorporate into the buildings. This level of participation epitomizes a human resource framework with its focus on participation.

There is also an open process around student support to help produce commitment. The educational support team meets weekly to discuss students who are referred to the team for intervention (J. Graf, personal communication, December 13, 2020). Decisions about academic changes are made at department heads meetings, which are run by the assistant head of school. Department heads know the agenda items ahead of time and ask their departments for feedback and then share the feedback with the larger department team (J. Graf, personal communication, May 11, 2021).

The school also maintains balance between human needs and formal roles. The creation of a new department, the humanities department, came out of the desires of some of the teachers, although it needed a push from administration to ensure all members of the English and social studies departments joined. Additionally, a new food program was developed by staff members with a mission of "Healthy body, Healthy mind, Real food" (Burr and Burton Academy). The food program changed the school food from traditional cafeteria lunches to real, nutrient-dense food created through ingredients that are procured in a socially responsible way. The creation of a new department and a new food program from teachers and staff at a grassroots level indicates that there is openness to systems change and communication that goes in multiple directions instead of only top-down.

The teacher-evaluation system also shows a human-resource bent. The creation of the evaluation system was done through a committee of faculty members. There are three tiers to the evaluation system. Tier one is for teachers in their first three years of teaching and includes more support and more frequent feedback. Tier two is for teachers who have been at the school longer than three years and have not been identified by the administration as needing to improve in specific areas; most of the faculty falls into this category. There is a four-year evaluation cycle for teachers in tier two. Each year teachers write their own goals, go over them with their department chairs, and then reflect on their goals at the end of the year. They are evaluated formally, including observations and the creation of a portfolio, every fourth year. Tier three is for teachers who have been identified as needing improvement. Teachers in this category have a specific area identified as needing improvement and are given support to improve. The teacher is observed in the identified area several times throughout the year. At the end of the year, they can be moved to tier two or are not asked to return. The self-goal setting that most teachers can do, as well as the self-reflection, indicate a human resources frame. Additionally, both the first and third tiers are focused on helping teachers improve rather than on letting teachers go. The entire process is focused on growth and self-actualization, which is the prevailing motivation of the teaching staff.

Additionally, there are multiple opportunities for teacher leadership. There are focus groups, leadership teams, and department heads. Additionally, teachers will approach administration with an idea and then are often asked to lead a group in planning how to bring that idea to fruition. Some ideas are actualized, and others aren't, but very few original sparks are discouraged. This keeps people involved and communication open. Additionally, people are kept involved through departmental goal setting, which occurs annually. Departmental members work as a team to develop their own goals and prioritize them. They reflect on these goals at the end of the year.

Communication focused through a human resources frame is about the exchange of information, needs and feelings. The assistant head of school and the dean of curriculum will often plan monthly faculty meetings with best teaching practices in mind to help gather information about faculty needs and feelings on particular topics. This information gathered is examined and a decision about the topic is shared out later by administrators.

Many of the examples in the human resource frame follow Argyris and Schon's (1996) Model II. Argyris and Schon's (1996) theory distinguishes a self-centered model from an other-centered model. Model I is self-centered, when organizations believe certain individuals are the source of their organizational problems. Model II is when an organization focuses on the potential within individuals to meet the goals. Argyris and Schon's (1996) model clarifies the human resource frame to show that there can be fundamentally different attitudes towards an individual, despite always focusing on the individual. The examples above of the school through a human resource perspective indicate that the Model II is more often used.

The barriers to change in a human resource perspective are anxiety, uncertainty and the feeling of inadequacy (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In this perspective, organizations are not only about operations, but about building capacity through training and support. Differentiation is needed in working with staff, recognizing that not all people will respond the same way to organizational change (Graetz & Smith, 2010). Another barrier in this perspective is that the needs of individuals are not always aligned. An organization should recognize the differing needs and address them, rather than choosing the needs of the majority and fulfilling them. While the New England high school recognizes the leadership potential in many members of staff, it struggles to address differing needs. For instance, in the school movement towards a proficiency graduation model, some individuals and departments want to move more quickly, while others do not want to move at all. In an attempt to bring everyone along together, those at both ends were frustrated. This is an example of differing needs that were not addressed to move forward together.

The Political Frame

The political frame views organizational behavior as irrational and erratic (Kezar, 2001). This concept requires coalition building and strategies to win power struggles to accomplish goals (Graetz & Smith, 2010). Bolman and Deal (2017) refers to organizations through this framework as jungles, as time and resources are limited and are therefore necessary to fight over. Conflict in this context is neither good nor bad, but necessary.

The lens of the political frame is more difficult to pin down at this New England School, not because it does not occur, but because it is hidden. It is much more obvious when examining the school's relationship with other schools than within the school itself. For instance, the headmaster is involved in state politics, as chair of the state board of independent schools, attending and speaking at board of education meetings, and even hosting a state board of education meeting at the school, complete with 90 minutes of speeches and a tour of the school (State Board of Education Meeting).

The school thrives off its donations, with an Advancement Office of five full time employees (Burr and Burton Academy). The pursuit of donations is a political act, as it causes the school and its employees to put on a (mostly) united public face about the school. Interviews with the press need to be approved by the headmaster before they occur, and an employee's name in the media with a negative connotation result in a discussion with the headmaster, regardless of whether the article or actions were school related (M. Tashjian, private correspondence, April 21, 2011). Media is an opportunity to gain or to exercise power.

In examining the school through the political frame internally, little conflict is evident. When there is conflict, it is often resolved between the teachers' union and administration. However, even this setup is not very adversarial. For instance, in the past ten years, the teachers voluntarily took a pay freeze twice at the request of the board, even though the current contract legally granted the teachers an increase in pay (N. Strain, personal communication, March 5, 2021). 2020-2021 was a negotiating year for the normal five-year contract between the school board and the teacher's union. Due to COVID, they chose not to fully negotiate because it was unclear what the stock markets would do and so much of the school's wealth is in endowments placed in stocks. Instead, the board offered a $5000.00 increase for every teacher as a sign of goodwill (N. Strain, personal communication, March 5, 2021). This was more money than the previous contract would have given to teachers. While this negotiation between the union and board is an example of political bargaining, it ends up being more focused on being an opportunity for both sides to make their interests known than forcing or manipulating others.

Power at this school lies in the hands of the administrators. There is no teacher input in the evaluation process of administrators. The school board evaluates the headmaster without asking the teachers or staff for feedback. There is power in evaluation, and that power remains firmly in the hands of the board of trustees and the administration.

Through the lens of the political frame, barriers to change are a lack of power and the ongoing conflict between winners and losers (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Resistance is directly proportional to the perceived threat of the new initiatives to their own agenda (Snyder, 2018). The example of the negotiations between the school board and the teacher’s union is an interesting example of this played out at this New England school. When both sides state what is most important to them, there is a history of listening to that and negotiating so that each side gets what they want. Resistance, therefore, is limited, due to a lack of a perceived threat. Compromise is the main tool in the powerplay handbook within this school. On the other hand, stronger power plays occur between the school community and outsiders when there is a perceived threat. When the state board of education came out in 2016 with a new set of rules for governing private schools, hundreds of community members came out for meetings on the rules in the town of this independent New England school. In the end, the state backed down and significantly changed the language of the new laws (Therrien, 2016). This show of force at local state board meetings, causing the board members to apologize and explain how they will do things differently in the future, falls directly into the political frame by seeing meetings as competitive occasions to win points and the use of coercion to force the state’s hand.

The Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame uses symbols such as myths and metaphors, stories and tales, rituals and ceremonies to influence others. A typical symbol for a school is their mascot, which is "an arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract designation of something else subject to a variety of interpretations by those who use it", as a symbol is described by Wood (1982, p. 63). In the case of this school, a Bulldog is the symbol. The dog is not only painted onto the turf fields and all sorts of athletic equipment, but the headmaster is referred to as the "lead dog" (J. Blake, personal communication, June 23, 2020). In a letter to parents, the headmaster wrote that "I am confident that with time, the small number who are behaving outside of the norm will develop an understanding of all that it means to be a bulldog" (The Bullhorn, 2021). This indicates that most students, parents, and staff interpret the symbol of the dog the same way, ensuring that the symbol influences behavior. If a symbol is uniformly interpreted by all members, Neurberger (2000) argues, invoking the term will stimulate a deliberate behavior.

The faculty and staff receive articles of clothing as their bonus each year with the dog mascot on the clothing. Putting on anything with the dog symbol confirms values and provides opportunities for bonding. The school also created the "superfan". If a student wears a "superfan" shirt (they come only in the school colors) to a school game, they get in free. This leads to a lot more fans, since admission is free, as well as a strong showing of school colors at the games.

The Student Success Program also uses symbols to create meaning. Their motto, one that is habitually repeated so that every student in the program can state it on cue, is "Goals, Habits, Growth" (J. Pergament, personal communication, August 1, 2019). This motto is stitched onto the backpacks each student receives when they enter the program. Additionally, each year when a new ninth grade group enters the program, they are referred to as a cohort that looks out for each other and holds each other accountable.

Additionally, there are meaningful rituals within the Student Success Program, beginning with the camp before students' ninth grade year. Teachers who were first-generation, college-bound students themselves tell their own stories of success. The end of the program also reflects ritual, as the end of year trip is a rewarding celebration of student engagement.

The construction of the new building at the school was full of symbolism. Although many voices were heard in the strategic planning, in the end the headmaster and the board of trustees had final say. They chose to create a new humanities' building that was full of meaning but not organized to fit the entire humanities department inside. The building is beautiful and could easily fit into a college campus. It is 25,000 square feet, with a central space that climbs three stories high with a ceiling height of over 50' (The Bullhorn, 2021). The philosophy behind it was that it "honors the past while looking to the future" (The Bullhorn, 2021). The official opening ceremony was marked by a speech by the assistant head of school full of symbolism.

> Notice the center stairs. Let them remind you to climb to new heights–to discover new ways of knowing the world and yourself. Sometimes learning is bounding up the stairs two at a time–energetic and invigorated. Other times learning is a slow trudge–one stair at a time. Remember, there is great value in both kinds of climbing.
>
> Notice the windows. I hope the shifting light reminds you to look at issues from different perspectives. As your perspective shifts, your thinking changes. Let the sweeps of landscape focus your learning in new ways.
>
> Notice the expanse of the building–the long views. Let them deepen and refine your vision for today, and for your future. Let the scale invite you to think bigger and beyond your time at Burr and Burton Academy.
>
> This space reminds you to take a breath–to breathe oxygen into the parts of you that fuel learning. Leave space for spontaneity–for the unexpected; leave space for reflection; leave space for joy. (The Bullhorn, 2021)

The building, although useful, was created with the symbolic lens more than the structural lens, as it is not as efficient as it is a symbol. The strategic planning was a negotiation of meanings, and the opening ceremony was a ritual to signal responsibility.

Meetings are often occasions that the school uses to transform the culture. Each year two of the monthly faculty meetings are devoted to celebrating teachers. One in the spring is a time of giving out the sabbatical and grants, as well as the two teachers who are being recognized. One in the fall is when the teachers who received a sabbatical or grant talk about their experience. The board of trustees and major donors are invited to these events and thanks and praise for their generosity occurs. These two meetings are sacred occasions and occurred even when the school shut down for COVID. Additionally, at the end of the year the staff is celebrated with a fully catered meal and individuals are celebrated. Those teachers who were evaluated that year have a speech given about them and are given a gift of a book personally picked out for them. Flowers are given out, one rose per year of service to the school, in celebration of longevity and commitment to the school.

Additionally, the school creates a new motto for each school year. It is introduced with a story at the beginning of the year, and the motto is repeated through stories or in creative ways each week at the weekly assemblies. Students, or sometimes famous outsiders, are held up as examples of this motto. Meaning is made through the stories to create shared values and to create an image of accountability and responsiveness.

One area the current headmaster frames both symbolically and politically is the quality of the school. He frequently states that the school is the best school in the state. This assumption is especially interesting, as there is no evidence to back it up. The school's standardized test scores are above average for high schools in the state, however several schools scored higher. The school's average on the state standardized tests in English is 62.1 versus a state average of 55.1 and the average in math is 47.2 versus the state average of 34.9. (Vermont Agency of Education) The 'best school in state' assumption is based on theater, both as a reference to Bolman and Deal (2017), and to the school programs, such as theater productions, musical performances, academic teams, and sports trophies. The school looks physically beautiful and is laid out like a college campus, complete with a turf field, quad and the original building with a bell tower from the 1800s. While the headmaster's insistence that the school is the best school in the state is understandable due to the need for donations from the wealthy, the fascinating aspect is that the faculty, staff, administration, parents, and students appear to believe their own story. On Niche, an online anonymous tool where anyone can grade a school in several categories, as well as leave comments about the school, 77% of respondents voted that "This school is the best in the area", while an additional 14% stated that "This school is nationally recognized" (*Explore Burr & Burton Academy)*. However, Niche also uses statistics to rank schools and out of only 21 college prep private high schools in the state, this school is ranked number 12, clearly the middle of the road (*Explore Burr & Burton Academy)*. This belief that the school is the best can keep the school from pushing towards greatness because it assumes it is already there, even though there is no proof but symbolism.

This New England school has a unique culture created through ceremonies to create faith. Barriers to change through the symbolic lens are clinging to the past or losing meaning and purpose. One issue that this school faces is that the product of the school, education, is vague. There is no data used to judge success. This school has rejected standardized testing as its standard, although it is unclear whether this is for philosophical reasons or because the school's test scores are as strong as the administration would like. Students are the customers, but student voice and student feedback are not at the center. Student feedback is not required at the end of courses, nor is student feedback collected and examined in other ways. There is an assumption that student feedback is too limited to matter because students want A's, not education. However, this vagueness on the product of education is paired with a structure of vertical coordination that is outcome oriented. The structure remains a traditional hierarchical system, with the working units being departments based on subject matter. This structure is outcome driven and can work well when the outcome is clear so that there is a chain of command and decision making can be based on data. However, this hierarchical system is paired with unclear data, which brings into question the system's usefulness.

Leadership Analysis

Bolman and Deal (2017) advocated for leaders to practice a multi-framed approach to their organization. Each situation should be examined, and an effective leader should choose the framework within which to act. Sometimes roles and structures should be more clearly defined, while others need a symbolic recognition of accomplishments. Change may require sensitivity to individuals or building alliances and leveraging relationships. The nuances of each of the four frames should be understood by leaders to be effective. The leaders should understand their own setting and be knowledgeable about the culture and climate there. What works in one setting does not always work in another. Other researchers agree with Bolman and Deal (2017) that a multi-frame approach is necessary not only for effective overall leadership, but for change implementation and a response to resistance to change (Graetz & Smith, 2010). If the framing of issues does not change as the definition of effectiveness changes, the lack of change may be fatal to an organization (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). In fact, multiple frames can be helpful within the same issue, as individuals within an organization may view their organization differently (Bolman & Deal, 2017). It is frustrating for employees to want clarity of job expectations when a leader is telling symbolic stories. Equally problematic is when employees want psychological encouragement and are subjected to choosing a political alliance. However, there can be individuals examining the same issue from all four frames and therefore it is helpful for a leader to approach the issue from all four perspectives.

Many leaders have a preferred, or dominant, framework from which they make decisions (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The three main decision makers at this New England School will be examined separately to determine their preferred framework, and then analyzed as a whole for effectiveness.

The board of trustees at the school examines the school through a structural framework. Leaders using the structural frame sets clear goals, designates people-specific roles, and coordinates using policies, procedures and a formal chain of command (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The school board set up the structure of the school and has kept the structure consistent for the past two decades. This instills predictability and uniformity so that comparable situations are handled in a consistent way.

The board of trustees uses strategies to set objectives and to coordinate resources, as seen with their handling of financial planning. Structural leaders keep an eye on the bottom line and value hard data. Additionally, their use of a bird's eye view of 50,000 feet rather than getting involved in daily planning allows them to use a rational sequence to produce decisions because they aren't caught up in the daily political battles or making emotional decisions based on recent events. The board looks at the elementary school and plans for ten years down the line to determine whether new land needs to be purchased or new buildings erected. Information is communicated from the board to the employees rather than the other way around because this is efficient communication. The board meets regularly, and these are formal occasions with the goal of making decisions. Finally, the board uses economic incentives for motivation, a classic structural incentive.

The headmaster uses the symbolic framework to gain political advantage, effectively uniting the two frameworks. His storytelling as meaning-making is convincing to the community and to donors, giving the school over a million dollars in donations a year in addition to thirteen individual school boards voting to pay the tuition rate for the students in their communities to go to the school. This combining of the two uses the symbolic to mitigate some of the main areas of conflict of the political. For instance, the political frame has a basic assumption that members of the organization have differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality. However, through storytelling and the control of information, the head of school begins to decrease the number of differences in these areas. Likewise, if another basic assumption of the political framework is that there are scarce resources and important decisions involve the allocation of these resources, his goal is to increase the number of resources through myth creation to reduce conflict. As Bolman and Deal (2017) point out, during periods of prosperity the power associated with the allocation of resources allows for decision making without much conflict. It is only when there is a period of deprivation and resources are limited that decision making leads to an increase in conflict. The head of school effectively uses symbols and myths to continue in periods of prosperity in order to reduce conflict.

The headmaster's communication style is storytelling, but the stories appear to be used to influence and manipulate others. As Bolman and Deal (2017) note, no conceptual perspective is value neutral. The use of rituals and symbols to signal responsibility is a negotiation tactic.

Conflict is kept under cover to preserve the ideal of a perfect school. In many ways, the approach is effective. The stories told about an organization from a symbolic perspective create heroes or heroines of organizational members (Clark, 2017). The stories do not need to be perfectly accurate; they only need to be believed. To say that the stories of the headmaster are used to influence and manipulate others has a negative connotation, however that connotation is not intended. As Pondy (1978) stated,

> the effectiveness of a leader lies in his or her capability to make an activity meaningful for those in his or her role set so that they do not change behavior but to give others a sense of understanding regarding what they are doing and specially articulate it so that they can communicate about the meaning of their behavior… If the leader can put it into words, then the meaning of what the group is doing becomes a social fact (p. 94-95).

Stories are meant to influence and manipulate in order to convey meaning and the use of them can make the headmaster a more effective leader.

The headmaster also uses rituals and ceremonies to symbolize beginnings and ends in order to express the culture's values and beliefs. Before the headmaster arrived at the school, there was a tradition of the "senior steps", a set of stone steps at one of the many entrances to the main building on campus that only seniors are allowed to use. Like many rituals, this rule is not written down, but was clearly understood and followed by the entire community. Additionally, there was a tradition that on the first day of school, the freshmen all walk into an all-school assembly to a standing ovation. The headmaster added to these already established rituals. When freshmen walk into the first assembly of the year, he shakes every person's hand. On the last day for seniors, school is stopped fifteen minutes early and the seniors line up inside the building in front of the senior steps. With the bells in the bell tower ringing (which otherwise only happens when a state championship is won, another ritual), the seniors shake the headmaster's hand and walk out of school down the senior steps with the rest of the school lined up from the steps down to the road, clapping until all seniors have gone through the line. These types of rites and ceremonies give expression to a culture's values (Trice & Beyer, 1993) In this case, the ritual expresses a commitment to graduating and having the result of that commitment celebrated by the entire community.

When the head of school tells the faculty, students, parents, and donors that the school is the best high school in the state because it has the best teachers, it has a ripple effect. Faculty believe the headmaster's statement to be true and want to live up to the standard, so they work harder. Students believe him and respect and love for teachers is evident. Niche uses say the following about the faculty at the school:

> "Teachers are excellent" (2013);
> "Everyone is very friendly and very easy to talk to" (2014);
> "I love my teachers" (2014);
> "I never had a teacher who didn't do everything they could to make sure their students achieved as much as possible in their course. The teachers are always available after school for extra help and often provide multiple forms of instructions that allow each student a chance to understand the lesson in multiple ways" (2015);
> "The faculty is extraordinary. They are supportive, helpful, great at teaching, and love being around the students. It feels like one big happy family (2018);
> "School family" (2018); and
> "The teachers have supported me so much throughout my time here and I have become super close to many. Teachers here truly care about you which you don't see at many schools" (2019). (*Explore Burr & Burton Academy)*

Parents also believe in the myth and stories produced by the headmaster, evidenced by the yearly vote to approve the school tuition. The vote occurs every March and habitually the towns approve the tuition rate through a popular vote. Finally, donors also believe him, as evidenced by the continued use of faculty as the draw for donations. On "Giving Tuesday" 2021, the ad on Facebook from this New England school stated that "Burr and Burton teachers place care at the center of all that they do. They challenge students to make connections that will inspire them for a lifetime. Please give today to support the excellent teachers of Burr and Burton

Academy. Because, together we rise." The stories the headmaster tells outsiders influences them. Bolman and Deal (2017) suggest that through stories, stakeholders from outside of the organization feel as though they know those within the organization and grow to admire them through the stories. The myth of the best teachers in the state is unfounded and yet widely believed. As a result of this belief, the school benefits through community, parent, student and teacher buy-in, as well as donation dollars.

Although the head of school favors a symbolic framework, there are no signs that he uses it for unethical or self-serving purposes, which is a danger for symbolic leaders. He also does not appear to have developed a "messiah" complex, which is when focus is shifted from the organization to the leader (Daft, 2005). It is interesting to note that when a leader defines and imposes meaning for others, this gives the leader the power to convince the powerless to accept and support structures and processes that are not in their best interests (Bolman & Deal, 2017). In this case, the symbol of the headmaster as the "top dog" of the school does define his role and power status, as Daft (2005) claims symbols associated with leadership do.

The last leader, the assistant head of school, strongly favors the human resource framework. Meetings that she runs are looking for two-way communication to find out the needs of the staff. As Daft (2005) suggests, those leaders working within a human resource frame define problems and issues in interpersonal terms and are continually looking for ways the organization can adjust in order to meet those human needs. She leads the department heads, in which educational decisions are made, and the process seeks out input from the department heads. The process additionally is structured in a way in which the department heads are asked to gather feedback from their departments to bring to the table so that all are represented. These are clearly gatherings to promote participation rather than opportunities to gain power. The goal of professional development for the past three years was to follow an open process to produce commitment in the decision to move towards proficiencies.

The assistant head of school tries to maintain a balance between human needs and formal roles. When a teacher seeks out leadership opportunities, the assistant head of school helps the individual to find a way to lead even without a title of leadership, essentially empowering the teachers. Additionally, her approach towards conflict is to develop relationships by having the individuals confront the conflict. At first it is expected that individuals work conflict out between themselves; after that, conflict is mediated by the assistant head of school. Similarly, if a parent complains about a teacher, the assistant head's first step is to get the perspective of the teacher. Finally, there is a great deal of trust given to teachers. So long as they complete their work and are prepared to teach, there is leniency for requests to be excused from contractual requirements (M. Kenny, personal communication, December 8, 2020).

The assistant head of school also focuses on self-reflection as an evaluation tool. She sees self-reflection as the best process for helping individuals grow and improve. This same self-reflection is expected from departments in their goal setting and end of year self-evaluation. Since this is done at a departmental level instead of an individual level, it has the additional bonus of keeping people involved and communication open. The assistant head of school makes it clear that she is on a path of growth and self-actualization along with the faculty. She will often share her own self-reflections and cries at times at faculty meetings, showing a willingness to exchange feelings with the faculty.

The fear for those using the human resource frame is that the leaders can either be perceived as, or bend to the whims of others (Daft, 2005). What may appear to be compassion or a commitment to participation by the leader could in fact be an excuse to avoid leadership responsibilities, or at least be perceived that way by others in the organization (Daft, 2005). This assistant head of school appears to be more of a partner with the faculty, rather than a servant-leader who bends to their whims. Mary Parker Follett and Elton Mayo, early developers of the human resource frame, believed that both leaders and employees should view themselves as partners (Robbins & Judge, 2003). Greenleaf's (1977) theory of servant leadership defines a servant leader as someone who is willing to serve the needs of their followers. The assistant head of school is not quite a servant leader under this definition because she does not put all aside for the needs of employees. However, she does listen herself to their needs and then negotiates with them, so their needs are met, as well as the needs of the organization. This falls more under Robbins (2003) partner model of the human resource frame or Collins (2001) definition of 'first who, then what'. In partnering with teachers, she has few problems with motivation or managing employees. Additionally, by not falling into the servant leadership trap of following the whims of the employees, she can both value relationships and understand that needs are not always aligned.

Taken individually, leaders at this New England school each have their preferred frame(s) of reference. Initially, this appears to be problematic as Bolman and Deal (2017) suggest that since organizations have multiple realities, leaders must use multiple perspectives to view the organization. However, another option is also available. Individual leaders can each use their own frames, and even be counted on to view the organization from their perspective. However, the leaders could all come together to make decisions to lead the school, thereby employing all the four frames in the decision-making process. In the case of this New England school, all four frames are effectively used by the school board (structural), headmaster (political and symbolic), and assistant head of school (human resource). The structure of the leadership is a sort of checks and balances of the perspectives of the differing frames. This addresses the critique of Bolman and Deal's four frames, which is that it may not be possible for the leadership frames to be voluntarily chosen and, if they could be chosen, the multi-framing can lead to overly complex thinking (Vuori, 2018**)**. While Dunford and Palmer (1995) addressed this concern through research that showed that participants trained to use the four frames, reframing, and multi framing believed they were more effective leaders after the training, the solution of multiple leaders making decisions together while examining issues from multiple frameworks still stands as a valid option.

Another critique of Bolman and Deal's frameworks is that it neglects the perspectives of the bottom of the organizational structure (Laudicina, 1992). Indeed, the framework examines organizations themselves and how leaders view the organizations but spends little time on how others view the organization. At this New England school, the perspectives of the teachers are caught by the assistant head of school, giving an outlet for the teachers' voices. However, other voices are not routinely captured. While there is a teacher's union, there is not a staff union, nor is there a method of collecting feedback from staff. The school board does not have a faculty or a staff representative.

Additionally, student-voice is not routinely heard. The school board also does not have a student representative. While there are certainly many students in leadership positions, and these leaders can, and sometimes do, set up meetings with the administrators in order to make their voices heard, these are the voices of the loudest and are not necessarily the opinions of the majority. The school does have a student council with elected officials from the student body, but their main job is to fundraise and plan activities such as prom night. When new policies are created, the student body is not asked to weigh in on those policies. In 2020, there was an example of the student body rising in anger over a dress code policy and the enforcement of that policy. There was a grassroots protest in which a significant portion of the student body wore crop tops to school in protest that these shirts were not allowed. The assistant head of school set a meeting for anyone who wanted to attend, students, parents, community members, faculty, etc., and she listened to the student body as they explained how it makes them feel to be called out for their clothing and for girls to be 'dress-coded' so much more often than boys. In the end, she changed the dress-code policy. (M. Kenny, personal communication, May 12, 2021) This example indicates that although there are not built into the school system ways to routinely hear student feedback, the school is open to hear the feedback and to react to the student needs. However, for students' voices to be more effective, the school should consider a way to collect student concerns more frequently.

Metaphors allow humans to visualize change. Leaders can use metaphors to both understand the expectations of themselves and the role they play within reform (McCandless, 2012). Lumby and English (2010) identified seven metaphors used to create understandings of systems and policy by educational leadership: machinery, accounting, sports, war, theater, religion and lunacy. These have not always been the prevailing metaphors for educational leadership. The metaphors have changed over time, according to Reitzug, West and Angel (2008). In our current accountability era in education, metaphors now tell a story of leaders as data collectors and inspectors of performance rather than curriculum leaders or coaches of teachers. The metaphors leaders use have the power to change, and the use of metaphors creates the culture and understanding of a school.

There is tension between the scientific management principles in our current accountability era in education and the metaphors teachers create for themselves as professionals. The scientific management principles lead to a metaphor of schools as sites of production, where economies of scale are asking teachers to teach more students in larger schools and produce better students. Knowledge is the new economy according to Marquardt (1996), who argues that we have moved from Darwin's "survival of the fittest" to survival of the "fittest to learn" (pg. 6). The uniform product of these schools are students with particular test scores.

The New England School studied in this research does not use metaphors of scientific management principles, steering clear of the tension between the complex job of teachers to professionally educate students and the more simplistic definitions of 'educate' based upon test scores. The head of school's disinterest with data and belief that the picture is much broader than data portrays, effectively eliminates the problematic metaphor of schools as sites of production. However, it is possible that this is an unintended consequence of the metaphor the school does use, which is one that is resistant to change. The school has been in existence for close to two hundred years. Recently the head of school introduced his metaphor for the school to the faculty. It was based upon an ancient Greek structure, with four pillars holding up a roof and the core values of the school as the foundation.

An interesting feature of the ancient Greek structure as a metaphor is that it does not change. The pillars will hold up the roof for generations, no matter what the environment or weather may produce. However, that assumes that the outside world changes, but the inner world does not. The school's metaphor indicates that it will not adapt to the environment, but instead will endure the environment. The above example of this New England School avoiding the metaphors of leaders as data collectors or performance inspectors may be a result of the school never changing with the current climate of accountability. This is not to put a value statement on our accountability era, but to point out that accountability may not be forsaken for its own merits, but merely because it represents change.

The ancient Greek structure as a metaphor also does not allow for multiple linkages or dynamic patterns, although it does allow for independence and autonomy. The pillars do not touch each other; instead, they both connect the roof to the core values, and hold up the roof. These pillars are seen in the New England School, as significant autonomy is seen in departments. However, there is not a place for double loop learning, as suggested by Argyris (1977). The lack of this feedback loop has two consequences. First, decisions can be made without understanding its impact from multiple perspectives, and second, change occurs in pillars, but not as an organization, keeping change small.

The result of the ancient Greek structure as a metaphor for this New England School is that it has remained stable. It allows the community to make sense of the world by giving them a space where they understand how to respond and function because it will not change, despite the outside environment. It also gives the leaders of the school a framework with which to construct their role in the face of educational reform; they are to resist, stand firm, and wait until the current reform measure has passed. Understanding how heads of school make sense of national reform policy is of great importance because the implementation of this policy is strongly influenced by leaders' understanding of it (Coburn & Russell, 2008). Therefore, understanding how this head of school reacts to reform movements, according to the metaphor he introduced to the organization, can influence how change is introduced to the school.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Understanding both the organization and leadership can influence how research is conducted and how the research is responded to. The stories an organization tells itself are important. For this research to be meaningful to the organization it either needs to fit into the story of the organization that already exists, or it needs to give the organization a new story. One way to do this is to understand the metaphors in use by an organization. These metaphors can imply a “way of thinking and a way of seeing” (Morgan, 2006, pg. 4). Understanding the metaphors of the organization is not merely done in order to comprehend the story being told and how to fit with it, but also can lead to the twisting of the metaphor to uncover distortions and to shape a new reality.

An organizational and leadership analysis helps the researcher to make sense of issues. In this case, there is a program deemed successful through popular opinion, although not based on data. The success of the program is a story the organization tells itself, which is not a judgment on whether it is a successful program, only an example of the storytelling of an organization. For this research to be accepted by the organization, it should fit into the organization’s own storyline, or it should create a new storyline. This research is designed to fit into the current story of the organization. Through the study of positive deviants, only those students deemed successful by this organization are studied. The research is set up to only find positive results. The question of this research is to ask why the results are positive for these individuals. The findings will not change the story of the organization. However, the results can still impact the school and the program. The story of the school is that the program is successful, not that it is perfect. Through identifying teachable traits of successful students, these traits can be intentionally incorporated into the program in order to produce a higher likelihood of future successful students.

Metaphors can help the researcher know how the organization frames problems (Schon, 1979), or makes sense of issues. It doesn't merely interpret events, but actively constructs the events (Smerek, 2011). According to Schechter et al. (2018) there are three interrelated processes needed to make sense of ambiguity. The first is for the broader system to be mapped out through the collection of data. This research study accomplishes this task. The second process is to examine the data, particularly multiple interpretations of the data, in order to create a more organized perception of the issue. This research study analyzes data and produces findings to create a more holistic picture of student success in the program. Finally, action based on the interpretations created by this data analysis occurs for sense-making to come full circle. While actions are recommended, this final step is the job of the organization itself, not this research. However, for this last step to occur, the data and interpretations should be presented in such a way that the organization can weave it into their own stories and metaphors. In this way, understanding the context of the organization, its leadership and the metaphors it uses to understand itself, are important for this research to be actionable.

Summary of Practitioner Setting

Case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations (Yin, 2018). This case study contains its own, unique organizational structure, stories and metaphors, and leadership skills in which the Student Success Program is situated. The findings of this research can contribute twofold to scholarship. First, it can, at the local level, lead to actionable steps to increase the level of student success. This is done in part through an organizational and leadership analysis that understands that the story ingrained in the imaginations of the school community is one of success and works within this framework, instead of questioning it, to suggest improvements. Second, the findings can be generalized to generate a new understanding of success, one that is based upon teachable traits rather than test scores, grades, or college admissions. This new understanding of success also fits within the leadership analysis of the school due to its reluctance to rely on data to determine success. It is possible that a new understanding of success could alter the story the school tells itself or change the metaphor it uses to understand its purpose.

Section 3: Literature Review

Introduction: Equity

Since 1954 and *Brown v. Board of Education*, separate but equal has been deemed inherently unequal in the United States. In the decades since this ruling, the United States has struggled with the issues of equality for all learners. Equity was first referred to in 1990 in relation to the world-wide need to bring together equality and quality in the supply of education in each nation (Jurado de los Santos et al., 2020). At first it was framed narrowly as the breakdown of student outcomes on high stakes tests, resulting in solutions to equity issues laying in the hands of educators (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). The original coinage of equity as a bringing together of quality and equality conceptualizes equity as based on two principles: quality education for all through developing the maximum social, intellectual, cultural, and emotional capacities of individuals through effective equality of opportunity; and a shared effort in caring for the diversity of students (Jurado de los Santos et al., 2020). However, the objective of a just society where all children, regardless of ethnicity, class or gender, have access to the same resources and opportunities, harkens back to a definition of equality, not equity.

Equity is a system where resources are redistributed to create systems, including schools, that share a greater likelihood of being more equal (Brayboy et al., 2007). This requires an unequal distribution of resources that will temporarily favor and promote an increase in educational opportunities for students who historically have been marginalized. Under equity, differences between groups of people would not be a risk factor for discrimination or disadvantage, but instead an opportunity to meet their needs (Brayboy et al., 2007).

Osta and Perrow (2008) lay out three fundamental features of educational equity. First, the success or failure of a student must not be predetermined by cultural, social or economic factors. Second, bias found in policies, practices and learning environments must be ended. Third, students' unique talents, abilities and hybrid identities must be encouraged.

The need for equity is not merely the right to receive training according to one's possibilities, a unitarian definition whose main objective is to form a future workplace (Maloney et al., 2019). A social justice worldview should also be considered, which insists that each person, simply by being human, should receive what they need from the common goods to compensate for systemic inequalities, thereby eliminating biases related to personal, social or cultural factors (Lee, 2017). This perspective clarifies the interconnectedness and complex layers of equity by insisting that addressing inequities are accompanied by a value of diversity, an understanding of learning through the growth mindset, and the centrality of culture (Lee, 2017). Calabrese Barton and Tan (2020) add to Lee's argument by asserting that educational equity should not merely be inclusivity, but the result should be a legitimate belonging of marginalized students and families. This can occur through a trifold path of access, opportunities and outcomes.

This research focuses on students in poverty rather than on racial criteria due to research that suggests that economic factors contribute more to the achievement gap than cultural, linguistic, or racial (Reardon et al., 2019). According to Reardon et al. (2019), racial segregation appears harmful because of its concentration of students in high-poverty schools which are less effective than lower-poverty schools. When controlled for racial differences in school poverty, race was no longer predictive of achievement gaps. It is the difference in the school’s level of poverty that matters. Therefore, for this study, poverty is the focus point, with the understanding that in the United States, as of 2020, 19.5 percent of Black people were living below the poverty line. This is compared to 8.2 percent of White people, and 8.1 percent of Asian people (Poverty rate in the United States by ethnic group, 2020).

In framing equity, there are three foundational perspectives needed to address inequities: change theory, critical social theory, and systems thinking. Teemant et al. (2021) argue that in order to build capacity of stakeholders as agents of equity, we must envision equity "(a) as a relational, inclusive, and values-driven change process; (b) as inherently grounded in community with all of its social, cultural, historical, and political realities; and (c) as requiring a systems thinking approach" (p. 30), resulting in the three foundational perspectives of change theory, critical social theory, and systems thinking.

According to change theory, we should strive to overcome segregation among educators and stakeholders. Social relationships are patterned and organized along social class lines and relationships in schools mirror our relationships outside of school (Tharp et al., 2000). The solution to this is for stakeholders to intentionally work with those outside their social groups on a common cause. This will help develop the creation of shared values, perceptions and interpretations of the world across social groups. Pounder (1998) argues that underserved populations engaging in this work in schools changes their patterns of relating.

Critical social theory insists that in addition to dialogue, reflection and action are needed to change culture (Freire, 1994). This begins with a reframing of school norms, which are usually focused on the white, middle-class norm (Alim & Paris, 2017). This requires schools to focus less on their critique of students and instead become more critical of oppressive systems. Stakeholders need to be opened to seeing the world from multiple and more inclusive points of view and listening to understand those who feel invalidated, invisible, or oppressed (Dalai Lama et al., 2016; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Systems thinking holds some similarities to critical social theory. Senge et al.'s (2012) mental models, require reflection and inquiry, similar to Freire's (1994) focus on dialogue, discussed under critical social theory. However, systems thinking is about collectively recognizing and managing complexity. Systems thinking sees inequity as part of a whole and understanding the root causes of its complexities. This can be done through the examination of systems.

Equity, Standards and Accountability

Overtime, US policymakers and others have come to assume that income inequality and poverty are problems that can be solved by education reform alone, without other social, economic and political reforms, leading to the emergence of the teacher education accountability era and standards-based assessments. Schools and teachers are now expected to meet rising social expectations and achieve greater social equity, as well as producing a competitive labor force (Furlong et al., 2009).

Since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruled that separate but equal is inherently unequal, the United States has moved towards standardization as the new equality. Unfortunately, we have confused equity with equality, resulting in standardization of curriculum, assessments, and discipline. This focus on uniformity has been labeled the *hegemony of accountability* by Mathison and Ross (2002). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 required standardized assessments and the data from these assessments to be disaggregated for subpopulations. American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), from which Race to the Top (RTTT) (2009) was created, created common learning standards and state accountability systems. The latest Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) (2015) does scale back on standardization, giving state departments of education more responsibility, although accountability goals remain. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus on standards for all students, resulting in standardized instructional practices, mandated textbooks, and high-stakes assessments (Cramer et al., 2018). States are still required to test students annually in grades three through eight and the scores of all students must be reported to the government.

The focus on accountability occurred in the late 1900s when the United States shifted from a manufacturing economy to an economy based on information production and distribution (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). Human capital theory, which sees education as the central source of economic development, changed the goal of education to produce citizens that "contribute to production rather than relying on the social welfare state" (Tan, 2014, pg. 429). This change centralizes individualism. When the goal of education switches to producing productive citizens, equity gets defined narrowly according to the culture, values and ideology of the majority. Mathison and Ross (2002) propose that accountability "is about authority- who has it, who does not, and how it is exercised" (p. 97). Instead of accepting human capital theory, this study reflects a critical social theory that sheds light on existing social structures that privilege majority groups and leads to inequitable outcomes.

Accountability as a major reform strategy in primary and secondary education has been proclaimed to be the key to redressing inequality (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). For instance, Deming and Figlio (2016) studied how to design accountability measures into schools based on the lessons learned from K-12 studies. When rewards or punishments are tied to specific, short-term measures, organizations naturally steer towards those measures instead of longer-term effects. According to Cochran-Smith et al. (2017), the more metrics, the more strategic responses an organization will give. The largest gains for accountability measures are for those at the bottom of the score distribution, therefore having low standards, but strongly enforcing them will maximize the program's effects. This student growth measurement model is focused on test scores, or outputs, rather than inputs. Cochran-Smith, et al. (2017) refers to many educational accountability measures as ‘thin’ rather than ‘strong’ equity. ‘Thin equity’ are initiatives that assume equity is about individuals’ equal access. It argues that humans are rational actors who will take responsibility for themselves, and its main goal is assimilation of minority students into the norms of the majority (Tan, 2014). Conversely, ‘strong equity’ recognizes the systemic nature of inequity, with intersecting problems and needs. ‘Strong equity’ recognizes that forced educational assimilation through accountability measures only assumes objectivity, but it furthers inequities through denying that the measures themselves reflect a white, middle-class norm (Au, 2016).

High-stakes testing has long been a barrier to social justice, according to Duncan et al. (2019), who showed that graduation rates and college attendance are more important to examine than test schools at the high school level. Opponents to standardized assessments question whether it is possible to provide a full and accurate picture of what students can do (Gewertz, 2016). For standardized testing to be accurate, all students should be able to perform at the same level, in the same way, at the same time, on outcome measures. However, the imprecise nature of standardized testing is not the only problem. The act of choosing what to test remains deeply problematic, as it reflects the culture and values of the majority. In taking this problem one step further, it is also recognized that the testing itself creates value, perpetuating the cycle of inequity. “We are apt to measure what we can, and eventually come to value what is measured over what is left unmeasured.” (Alexander et al., 1987, p. 51)

There may be room for accountability to respect local values and commitments (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). This democratic accountability, according to Cochran-Smith et al. (2018), is based on examining all perspectives, ‘strong equity’ and the challenging of structural inequalities, and collaborations of diverse communities. The purpose of this case study is to play a role in democratic perspective-taking for the purpose of challenging the structural inequality of accountability measures. Through a refusal to define success for students in poverty based on test scores, grades and graduation rates and instead search for alternative definitions, this case study challenges the structural inequalities of these standard measurements. Additionally, through focusing on the perspectives of students in poverty to determine how and why they found success, this study engages in democratic perspective taking.

Emancipatory Leadership

The act of democratic perspective taking for the purpose of gaining insight into alternative definitions of success lines up with the concept of emancipatory leadership. Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972) first laid out this type of leadership, prioritizing giving voice to the oppressed and allowing them to be controlling agents in their own lives. Freire’s reasoning for this aligns with critical social theory, as he argues that no policy or curriculum is neutral. Freire argues that students should identify their own “generative themes” from their experiences, thereby becoming teachers of their own experiences (p. 97).

In this study, the students in poverty who are being interviewed differ from the decision makers in their economic status. While the educational leaders at the school try to cope with the sociocultural complexities that arise from economic differences, they are without the culturally precise insights helpful to make well-informed decisions. The result of decision making without listening to the people whose decision affects them can lead to these same students being molded into a pattern that the dominant group has chosen. Emancipatory leaders, instead, seek out the expertise of those with lived experiences in certain situations and extend the circle of decision makers to include others whose interests might be at stake (Corson, 2000). Asking students living in poverty to generate their own themes, and then basing decision making off a collection of these themes can result in more meaningful inclusion in the institutional practices and processes.

If the goal of a program, such as the one being studied in this research, is to help students living in poverty to achieve a lifetime of success, combating social injustice through a multidimensional process should be considered. The extent to which those living in poverty participate in decision making and are integrated into common cultural processes like education can also be examined (Ryan, 2006). The advantage of this approach is that it avoids blaming the individual and instead focuses on the structural nature of the problems. It recognizes the structural processes that create inequalities that prevent individuals from access, resulting in oppression (Ryan, 2006).

At the time of this study, the program studied in this paper attempts to practice inclusion, however inclusion is not simply a matter of integrating the marginalized into an already existing system, because the system is white, middle class, male and heterosexual. This type of inclusion allows the current system to run smoothly without fundamental changes because the status quo persists, albeit with new members, without any significant changes to the system. Meaningful inclusion requires that the system changes, not from without, but from within (Munch, 2005). Those accessing the program should be able to shape the systemic practices so that they will be able to both contribute and benefit from the program. Therefore, one goal of this research is to result in recommendations for change, based in the voices of those who went through the program.

Adolescent resilience as a mediating factor to risk

Consistent with democratic perspective-taking is examining not only what goes wrong for students affected by poverty, but what goes right in resilient students. Despite the risks associated with growing up in poverty, resilient children can overcome the odds and show positive development (Mastern, 2014). There is a lack of agreement about how to define resilience (Masten, 2014). Resilience in this study is defined as doing better than others facing similar risks (Rutter, 2006). This assumes the comparison group for resilience is others experiencing the same risk (D'imperio et al., 2000). This can be considered "low-threshold resilience" because it compares students doing better than other students in poverty rather than comparing the students to the average child who has not experienced poverty (Sattler & Gershoff, 2019).

Despite socioeconomic based differences, there is much resilience in students living in poverty (McBride et al., 2011). While poverty-related stress can shape students' lived experiences in negative ways, there are positive effects as well (Coll et al., 1996). The environmental shaping of individuals was referred to by Del Guidice et al. (2011) as "adaptive calibration" and these adaptations allow individuals to survive and grow. While these adaptive qualities can certainly be maladaptive as well, depending on the context, they are not merely deficits. The behaviors were developed because they were functional in the face of poverty-related stress. More research is needed in this area, as most literature on resilience has examined it as an outcome, and little research has focused on resilience as a predictor of later outcomes (Masten, 2014). Pairing research on resilience as a predictor of later outcomes with the teaching of skills and knowledge for matching different types of coping with stressful environments could produce the flexibility to switch strategies as needed (Wadsworth et al., 2018). This could produce exciting ways to use students' existing strengths to grow new skills to tackle a wider array of stressors and problems (Ellis et al., 20017). This strength-based (rather than deficit-based) approach would focus on context-specific factors to build upon their adaptive assets (Zimmerman et al., 2013). This study, in asking students for their own adaptive assets, is a strength-based approach and leverages the sense of self and pride that emerges from being part of an under-resourced and low-status social class to validate culture and foster agency. By grounding the study in the local context through a case study, the program can build a culturally specific sense of self in students that makes sense of their environment and guides behavior (Stephens et al., 2014).

Through highlighting the strengths of working-class values of endurance, strength, hard work and optimism in the face of adversity, the school program studied can encourage a functionally adaptive response to stressors (Chen & Miller, 2012). Following critical social theory, a focus on resilience as a strength of the adaptive assets resulting from poverty-related stress reduces focus on middle-class values and instead reaffirms the values of the environment in which students from poverty live. Recognizing the identities of students in poverty as functionally adaptive allows students to recognize them as coping resources to be built upon rather than deficits to be eliminated (Wadsworth et al., 2018).

Historical Perspective of Positive Deviance

Throughout the 20th century, deviance has been defined as veering off from the socially desired norms, with normalcy being its opposite. Positive Deviance is under the umbrella of positive organizational structures, as it highlights the positive areas beyond what is considered normal. Possibly first defined as extraordinary action by Wilkins (1964), positive deviance is a positive correlation to deviance that is made up of desirable behavior (Lavine, 2012). In traditional organizational literature, the behaviors that fall near the middle of the curve are studied. While there are two extremes to any distribution curve, currently the negative extreme attracts most of the focus (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn (2003) argued that the positive extreme of the curve has largely been ignored.

Positive deviance also resulted from the practical problems of the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to educational policy. Singhal and Svenkerud (2018) argue that evidence-based innovations are usually outside-in, expert-driven approaches that ignore or reject local solutions; instead, scholars should focus more on practice-based evidence and using the local communal wisdom to solve problems. One way to examine practical, local solutions is to focus on positive deviance. Positive deviance is defined by Herrington and van de Fliert (2018) as "both a theoretical concept and a practical strategy for understanding honorable departures from the norm, and effecting positive social change" (p. 676). Positive deviants find solutions in their own organizations, leading to the potential for more people to adopt the solution, as well as a higher likelihood of sustaining the solution, all because they are generated locally.

However, the history of positive deviance is multifaceted, with little agreement on either its precise definition or its theory. This is not surprising, since it is steeped in contradiction. Clinard and Meier, sociologists and social deviance scholars, wrote, "To understand deviance, one must first understand this contradiction; no consensus reliably identifies people, behavior, or conditions that are deviant though most people would say they know deviance when they see it" (1989, p. 22). For instance, early understandings of rule breaking assumed that it was inherently selfish or with a damaging intent (Lavine, 2012). However, Morrison (2006), showed that rule breaking can be used to benefit an organization. Not all positive deviance is breaking rules; much consists of departing from social norms.

In 1965 Wilkins argued that negative and positive deviance could only be understood in the context of each other. Ben-Yehuda (1990) argued that understanding both positive and negative deviance would further clarify our understanding of conformity.

Review of Current Literature related to a Theoretical Framework for Positive Deviance

The idea of deviance is mainly a social concept. Clinard & Meier (1989) summed up the prevailing theories on deviance: (a) Labeling theories argue that deviance was not an intrinsic state but required a social audience to react against. A group needs to deem something or someone deviant; (b) Normative theories define deviance as defying the social norms of a specific group, showing the subjective and malleable nature of deviance, as they are rooted in time, place and context; (c) Statistical views examine deviance as that which is determined by the statistical minority. Winslow (1970) represents a statistical perspective, defining deviance as acts which fall outside of the normal curve of conformity. This perspective is especially helpful in education, as there is great value in "extreme, deviant (in a statistical sense) or unique case sampling" (Ary et al., 2018, p. 430). The prevailing theories on deviance are examined below.

Normative Theory

Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) put forward a definition for positive deviance, that of "intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (p. 209). This differs from Hughes & Coakley's (1991) positive deviance definition of excessive conformity to norms and Goode's (1991) definition that claims that deviance is defined by the negative reactions to specific behavior. Under Goode's definition, there could not be positive deviance because if no negative reaction occurs, then a behavior is not deviant. While Spreitzer and Sonenshein's 2003 definition was slow to be widely accepted, cited only 18 times through 2010 (Lavine 2012, pg.1017), in the past decade it has become more widely discussed, with 714 citations in google scholar as of 2/16/21. It is now considered to be some of the most substantial scholarships on the topic of positive deviance (Lavine, 2012). Spreitzer and Sonenshein's definition of positive deviance is a normative definition, leading to a discussion of conflicting and prevailing theories of deviance.

The normative perspective on positive deviance focuses on the extent to which norms are conformed to or idealized (Lemert, 1951). Lemert (1951) refers to positive deviance as "variations from the social norms in desirable and enviable directions" (p. 23); Cohen (1967) suggests that it is "behavior that violates normative rules" (p. 12); and Merton and Merton (1968) states that "deviant behavior refers to conduct that departs significantly from the norms set for people in their social statues" (p. 805). Spreitzer and Sonenshein's (2003) earlier referred to definition of positive deviance as "intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (p. 209) fits within the normative framework, as it examines departures from norms.

Heckert and Heckert (2002) establish four main categories of problems related to normative theory. First, it is difficult to both identify and measure norms, especially taking care not to take into consideration people's negative reactions. Second, it is difficult to apply specific situations and contexts to abstract ideals, without which one cannot determine deviance. Third, normative theory assumes equal power of all people, thereby disregarding behavior against the standards of a powerful minority. Fourth, it ignores group reactions and the role of labeling within social audiences.

Reactivist Theory

The reactivist perspective emphasizes the role of the social audience in determining deviance (Hawkins & Teideman, 1975). This is true whether examining negative or positive deviance, as the behaviors are assessed by social groups as either negative or positive (Norland, Hepburn & Monette, 1976). The act of making rules is a social group's way of defining deviance (Becker, 1963). Therefore, "deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'" (Becker, 1963, pg. 11).

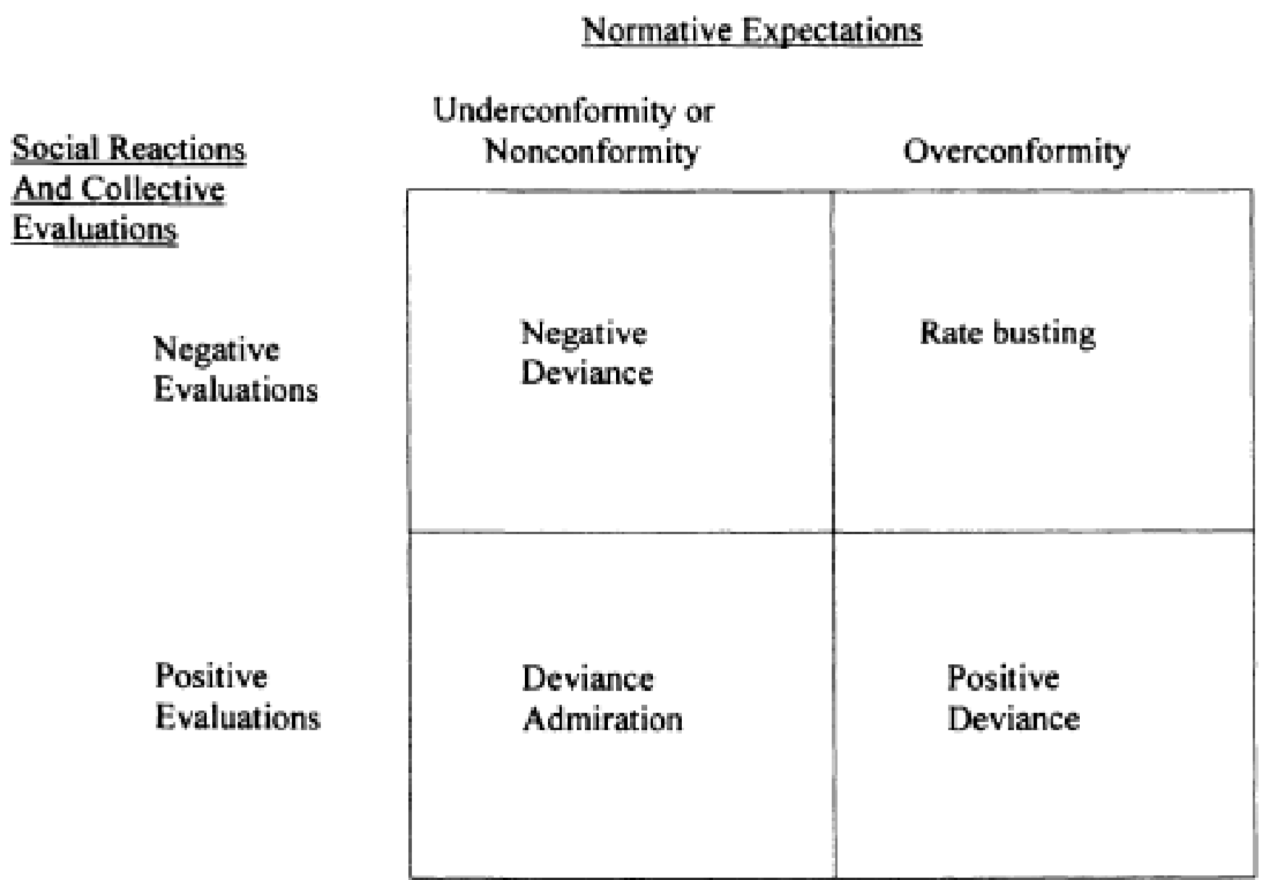
Critiques of reactivist theory can be grouped into two categories. First, Gibbs (1981) points out the gray area and lack of definition around what is deviance and how strong does the reaction need to be to constitute deviance. Second, what happens if the behavior is not detected, and yet it would be considered deviant if others knew? In other words, does the social audience need to negatively react to the behavior for it to be deviant? While normative theory focuses exclusively on norms, reactivist theory swings too far in the other direction, effectively ignoring norms in favor of a focus on individuals.

A Synthesized Approach

Dodge (1985) first synthesized the normative and reactivist theories by defining positive deviance as over conforming behavior that is positively evaluated. Heckert and Heckert (2002) developed a model that includes both reactions and behavior and includes both negative and positive deviance, as well as deviant admiration and rate-busting. Positive behavior can be responded to positively, called positive deviance, or negatively, called rate-busting. Likewise, negative behavior can be reacted to positively, as deviance admiration, or negatively, as negative deviance. (See Figure 2) Of course, the same action occurring for different audiences or social contexts will lead to different evaluations. Heckert (1989) pointed out that French Impressionists originally had a hostile audience, while today they are called 'masters of their time'. Irwin (2003) studied how elite tattoo artists and collectors are admired in a subculture while shunned in the dominant culture. Others have similarly studied other groups that are praised by some and devalued by others, such as gifted students (Huryn 1986), non-drinking college students (Herman-Kinney & Kinney, 2013), and female bodybuilders (Chananie-Hill et al., 2012). This emphasizes a relativistic stance towards deviance and the emergence of labeling theory.

Figure 2

Deviance Typology (Heckert & Heckert, 2002)



Labeling Theory

Steffensmeier and Terry (1975) describe deviance as consisting of "differentially valued phenomena" (p. 4). The phenomena being described are the acts or attributes that are being judged. While other theories of deviance focus on why people perform deviant acts, labeling theory focuses on how people come to be identified as deviant. Deviance is not just in comparison to the norm, but in the labeling and treating of the individuals considered deviant (Kitsuse, 1961). What sets labeling theory apart from other theories is that the process is circular; those labeled react to the label. Lemert (1951) describes this circle as primary and secondary deviance. In primary deviance, the individual is labeled but has not (yet) reacted to the label and is therefore not making choices based on the label. Secondary deviance occurs once those labeled attach themselves to the label and then organize their own identity and choices around the label. Kitsuse (1980) introduces positive deviance to Lemert's theory. In Kitsuse's (1980) addition, during secondary deviation, the individual who is labeled rejects the negative identity marker and instead transforms the label into a positive understanding of self, such as social activism.

Labeling interacts in interesting ways with positive deviance. Scarpitti and McFarlane (1975) suggest that positive behavior is considered a label and the societal reaction encourages the individual to transition from primary deviation to secondary deviation through self-defining themselves as positive deviants. "Intellectuals and saints are generally evaluated positively and are rewarded for their activities, thus hopefully again heightening the probability of future occurrence" (Scarpitti & McFarlane, 1975, p. 6)

Iovanni and Paternoster (1989) critiqued labeling theory for its inadequacies due to a lack of empirical support. It also fails to explain why people continuously engage in deviant activity without being labeled as such (Bernburg, 2019). Heckert and Heckert (2010) argue that the location of individuals and their identities in their typology (positive deviance, rate-busting, deviance admiration, negative deviance; see Figure 2) occurs through the labeling process. The individual and the social audience interact, resulting in both positive and negative evaluations, which can lead to responses through which a deviant may self-identity. Heckert and Heckert (2002) additionally address the variations in reactions to both under conformity and over conformity through an understanding of the combination of power and self-interest. The power, or lack of power, of the social deviant in comparison to their social audience can affect the type of reaction, positive or negative, the social deviant has.

Heckert and Heckert's (2002, 2010) typology of deviance (Figure 2) both synthesizes the normative and reactivist theories and addresses the critiques of labeling and is therefore the prevailing theory of this research. For the purposes of this research, the definition of deviance is "any type of behavior or condition that exceeds the normative standards or achieves an idealized standard and that evokes a collective response of a positive type" (Heckert & Heckert, 2002, p. 466). Of course, one of the challenges is specifying whose norms are being departed from. In this case, the norms are those set by a school that is both historically and currently white, middle class. Those the positive deviants are compared to are other students living in poverty at the school. Additionally, the labeling group should be specified. In this case, the labeling group are the two leaders of the school program, both middle class, white men. Using Hecker and Heckert's (2002, 2010) typology of deviance is valuable for this study, as it focuses on social change and therefore can lead to action research using their own questions as guides. When groups of individuals redefine themselves in a new category of the typology, "what social changes occurred that allowed such redefinition? Whose interests changed or were challenged, and by whom?" (2002, p. 473).

Gaps in Literature: Positive Deviance

When a positive deviant method has been used in educational research, a narrow lens has been used (Herington & van de Fliert, 2018). Positive deviance studies have been used for decades to learn about *what* positive deviants do differently, with the notion of replicating these surface features of practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Pascale et al., 2010). However, few studies of positive deviants in education ask *why* or *how* questions.

LeMahieu et al. (2017) examines the past research on positive deviants in education, finding six phases positive deviants move through to enact change. The six phases of this approach are:

> define the organizational or community problem and desired outcomes; determine common practices relevant to the problem; discover uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies that solve the problem (the positive deviants), through inquiry and observation; design an action learning initiative based on findings; discern (monitor) progress of the initiative by documenting and evaluating regularly; and disseminate results through sharing, honoring and amplifying success stories (pg. 109).

Mertens et al. (2016) also proposes a framework for studying positive deviance. The focus of this framework is to gain a deeper understanding of positive deviance and to explain both its causes and effects. The framework uses both quantitative and qualitative methods and draws together past, current and future studies, as well as various definitions of positive deviance, increasing research validity. Using this framework can help guide future studies on positive deviance. In combining LeMahieu et al.'s (2017) six phases and Mertens et al.'s (2016) framework, scholars can piece together an ideal study that moves beyond collecting data to see if the methods of the positive deviants were successful and instead study *why* the positive deviants were able to act outside the norm. Since students in poverty necessarily would be positive deviants in order to gain achievement equal to or higher than their economically advantaged peers, the creation of this positive deviant environment would benefit future research into students in poverty and their achievement levels. Therefore, leading to the research question of "Why do some students from poverty perform well in school?"

The tradition of deviant studies focusing on *what* questions goes back to Weber's work in 1971, where he examined what exemplary high schools in the US that served a high number of low-income students of color did differently. There was a slight shift in the mid-1990s as government policies and funding called for evidence-based practice, leading to quantitative positive deviance studies into *what works* (Slavin, 2002). The focus on *what* instead of *why* or *how* continued, as many studies in this time frame were published in the *What Works Clearinghouse.* More recently, Volley (2020) enacted a program evaluation of a summer school program on reading achievement for high poverty students using a mixed method approach that included MAP and STAR testing, as well as surveys and interviews. Findings included the identification of positive deviants, as most students in the program continued to make declines. Although the program did not then study why the positive deviants improved, the identification of positive deviants through this route can inform future studies. While these studies have their place in allowing researchers to see the readily observable features of successful practice, they lack nuance. When the results of traditional positive deviance studies are spread to other communities, they face criticism for ignoring the local and cultural needs of the new community (Thomas, 2011). The problem with these studies is that it is difficult to generalize findings beyond the community studied.

Practice alone does not explain what makes positive deviants different. Instead, a theoretical understanding of *why* the positive deviants performed well can help researchers understand the ideological and philosophical beliefs behind the practice. Often researchers do this through an existing social theory (Herington & van de Fliert, 2018). This study examines positive deviance through the lens of critical social theory, using a qualitative method to engage in the deeper *how* and *why* questions, rather than the more surface-level *what* questions.

While much of this research refers to positive deviants in their more universal definition, Pascale, Pascale, Sternin and Sternin (2010) created a Positive Deviance approach. This approach, like traditional positive outlier approaches, identifies what deviants do, however unlike the traditional approach, it is focused only on the local context. The goal is to uncover deviants and their successful practices in the local community, rather than to spread innovation. This is based on the belief that scaling the findings of positive deviant studies is not possible because findings are not adapting and therefore fail to take hold. This approach has addressed some of educations intractable problems, such as district-wide low student achievement (Richardson, 2004), dropout rates and student graduation rates (Singhal, 2013), absenteeism (Niederberger, 2011), and improving educational outcomes of specific groups of traditionally marginalized students (Kallman, 2012; Harper, 2012). These studies show that some of education's most difficult problems can be addressed using positive deviance, and yet the problem remains of adaptability. However, the commonality of the studies mentioned above are that they all examined *what* positive deviants did differently, not *how* or *why.* This research, in examining *how* and *why,* identifies positive deviants, but has the potential to break free of the problem of adaptability by examining deeper, below the surface of *what* is done, to *why* it is done. There is a basis in this potential. Ladson-Billings (2009) identified positive deviants in her Dreamkeepers work but was unable to identify *what* practices or behaviors were shared among the exceptional teachers she studied. She then expanded her study to explore *why* some teachers performed better than others. The result was her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, a dominant approach to multicultural education. While the present case study is not large enough to result in a new pedagogical theory, it could be used along with other case studies that examine *why* some students in poverty find success to develop theories that are adaptable in a wider context.

Summary of Scholarly Review

While positive deviance exists in every community, most scholarship usually dismisses them as statistical anomalies or rejects them. However, there are great strengths in moving from evidence-based practice, which is the traditional method, to practice-based evidence, the positive deviance method (Singhal & Svenkerud, 2018). Education's focus on evidence-based practice has caused positive deviant studies in the area to be few and far between. By using practice-based evidence, solutions are situated in the local context, thereby respecting the local culture. Additionally, this approach is practical because it is inherently sustainable. Unlike traditional evidence-based methods that are top-down, there is not a lengthy and expensive process to implement the changes. By definition, positive deviance solutions emanate from resource-poor individuals, making a positive deviant study a practical solution to an intractable problem in a local context.

Section 4: Contribution to Research

Introduction to the Contribution to Research

The purpose of this case study is to identify the teachable factors that create educational success for some students in poverty in the Success Program at a New England independent high school. The school supplied anonymous data with random numbers instead of names. This data was then used to calculate the mean GPA. Then, those individuals with GPA's higher than the mean were sorted according to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) score. Only the remaining alumni with ACE scores showing the highest risk were chosen. Out of these, the remaining individuals were sorted according to how active they were in the program, another score the school already collected. The school tracks how many aspects of the Success Program students participate in, indicating how active they are in the program. The top twenty-five of this final list was given to the program director. He then contacted each person on the list and asked them if they would be willing to participate. Once they indicated that they would participate, he released the names to this researcher.

Fifteen students' names were released to the researcher. Out of these fifteen, eight were interviewed. All participants chose to be interviewed via zoom. Semi-structured interviews took place in the spring and early summer of 2022. All zoom interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

Additionally, a survey was sent to faculty at the school for triangulation purposes. The survey used questions from Metlife's Survey of the American Teacher (2009) to ask questions about teacher's understanding of the term *success.* The Assistant Head of School included the survey in a faculty newsletter. Twelve faculty members responded anonymously.

The final piece of triangulation was documents related to the institution and the program itself. The analysis of these documents is included under Section Two, as part of the organizational and leadership analysis. A summary of this analysis is that the Success Program is understood to be successful due to popular opinion, but data does not support this opinion.

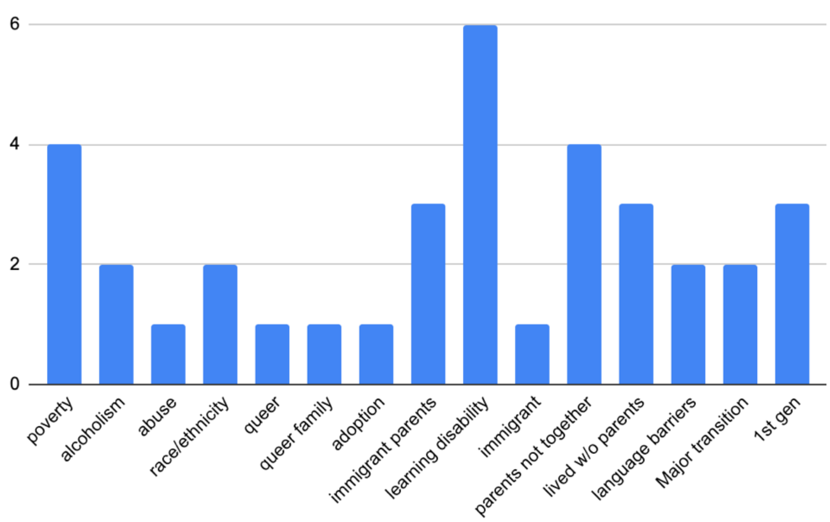
Results/Findings of the Research Study

Demographics

Out of the eight individuals interviewed, six of them identified learning disabilities or identified their Special Education teacher as an important part of their high school experience, indicating that they have a learning disability. One additional student identified anxiety as a major factor in his life. One of the students with a disability identified that they have dyslexia, a diagnosis not recognized as a learning disability in the state of Vermont, therefore not being part of the special education world in high school. Therefore, five out of eight students also had a relationship with a special educator in some way, shape or form.

Figure 3

Demographics of Participants



Only four participants identified themselves as having a low economic status in high school. Four out of eight of the participants also had parents who were separated. Three also had parents who were immigrants, and three lived without their parents for at least some of high school. Three alumni identified as being first-generation college bound. Two participants identified alcoholism in their family; two identified as people of color; two identified language barriers; and two identified major transitions occurring during high school. Each of the following were also identified by at least one participant: abuse, queer, queer family, adoption, immigrant.

None of the eight participants identified their gender during the interview. Given the researcher's hesitancy to place gender upon others, as well as to protect the anonymity of the participants, all alumni will be referred to individually with the pronouns they/them.

Cohort based on Similar Backgrounds

All the eight participants went to the Student Success Camp, a camp for incoming 9th graders to help transition between eight and ninth grade. They each discussed what they valued out of the camp. Six of the eight valued meeting classmates. Four students valued meeting teachers and four students valued having fun. Three students valued the completion of summer reading assignments and three students valued knowing where their classes were when school started. Two students valued that the program had the same kind of people as themselves. One stated that although they felt intimidated the first week of Success Camp, they soon found comfort in being with others like themselves.

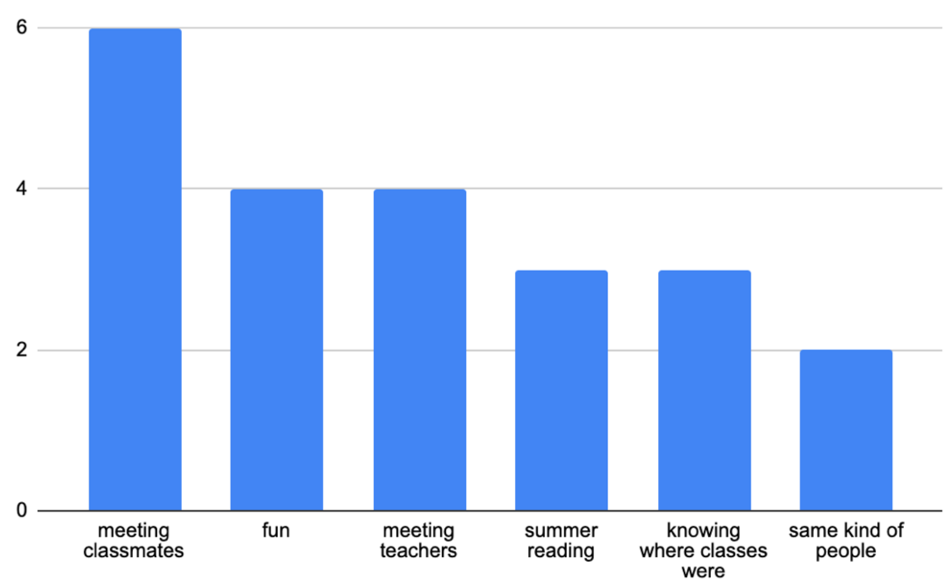
> It felt very quickly, like in the first week of being with everyone, 'Oh my god, I have people. There are people who are like me. There are people who are completely different from me, but we have these similarities.' Like, there were a lot of people who had parents with alcoholism. There were a lot of other students who grew up without college-

educated parents. It was clear that I wasn't the only one going through these things, so it was really that sense of community. (Participant 1)

It is interesting to note that the two students who valued that the program had the same kind of people as themselves, also identified themselves as low income. The value of being in a cohort of people facing similar backgrounds was also discussed in relation to the Prep for Success class. One student discussed how the class could have real conversations, recognizing their backgrounds. They were taught that "adversity is a good thing. It's how you're going to grow. But you need to do that work to turn that in a way that's going to help you" (Participant 1). While the students had these real conversations in their Prep for Success class, the lesson stuck with some students, who continued their connection with their cohort. "They were the people who I would go to if anything was happening and I was just like, 'Hey, I know you have very similar circumstances. Could I talk to you about this?'" (Participant 1)

Figure 4

Success Camp Goals



In addition to the support participants felt because of going to the Success Camp, one interviewee reflected that the experience resulted in their classwork being more differentiated and individually designed for their learning needs. “It was also great that teachers were there that were going to have freshmen in their classes because they were going to get a head start on, *How am I going to teach this person? How am I going to adapt to them?*.” (Participant 4) This student found that as a result, the teachers were “very accommodating and understanding of how I was learning.” Another student described working with a teacher who had been at camp. “She knew how my brain worked… She would sit me down and we would do it the way I understand it” (Participant 7).

Structure of the Program

Six of the eight students followed their camp experience with the Prep for Success Class, taken their freshman year. Only two students took the Prep for College class during their Junior or Senior year, although one of these had not taken the Prep for Success class their freshman year, indicating that seven out of eight participants followed up camp with at least one class in the program. Two students came back to Success Camp as mentors later in high school. Four students remembered attending Success Program social events, four attended end of year trips, and four went on college visits with the program. One interviewee commented on the structure of the program, stating that “it went through all the steps of being a young adult and getting into the next portion of your life that you won’t be able to take care of… At the very beginning it helped. With the very end too” (Participant 5).

The Success Program held monthly check-in meetings. Seven out of eight students attended these meetings. The one student who did not go to the check-in meetings instead met frequently one on one with the program director. These numbers also indicate that participation in the Success Program was an important indicator of success. One interviewee "really liked always having points of contact" (Participant 1). The engagement was not forced but connected to the support students were receiving. The same student referred to it as "non-stop support." One reason students were willing to engage in the monthly check-ins was because "everybody was there for the same reason, to get help and support, and it was provided" (Participant 2). "You never felt rejected or judged by anybody. It was seamless support" (Participant 1). One interviewee described their time in the Prep for Success class and monthly check-ins as the only times they were truly engaged at school.

> I just went [to school] to go and sometimes when I went to school, I just went just to be there [the Success Program]. I wasn't present in my mind… But when I was in the program or something, I snapped out of it. Every time I was in the class I would snap out of it and I would focus again… Every time I go to that class, I felt alive again. I felt comfortable again. I feel like that was a part of my success for me. (Participant 2)

Five of the eight applied for and received grants to attend events they were passionate about. This is a higher number than anticipated by the researcher, indicating either that a large percentage of students in the program receive grants or that the receiving of a grant and participating in something they are passionate about is an indication of success. One student indicated that a grant opportunity "fundamentally changed" their life because it "changed [their] outlook as to how you can help other people" (Participant 1). Additionally, it led to the "financial stability" of participant one "which is a thing that none of [their] family members had." Two of the five discussed learning that they were not interested in the field they were pursing because of the grant, but additionally mentioned that learning about their disinterest at that stage of their life was helpful in making future decisions. The program director supported the use of grants to figure out whether a future career was something individuals want to pursue. One individual who found out that her career idea was not right for her through a grant remembers that the director encouraged her to apply despite her reservations. “We could see what it’s like and see if its something we would want to do. [The Program Director] was all on board. He said, ‘Go for it! Go see the world kids.’ I feel like it pushed me to be a little more open-minded and just not be terrified of everything and take those risks” (Participant 7).

Another student who also learned through a grant experience that their career choice was not correct for them added, “That grant helped me to open my eyes a little bit. It helped me to discover that there are different ways to accomplish my goal, my passion, in the future” (Participant 8). The same individual later commented that simply taking advantage of this grant opportunity showed them that they “can do big things.” This openness to grants not only to get experience within a future career path, but also to figure out students’ passions appears to be a deliberate choice on the part of the program.

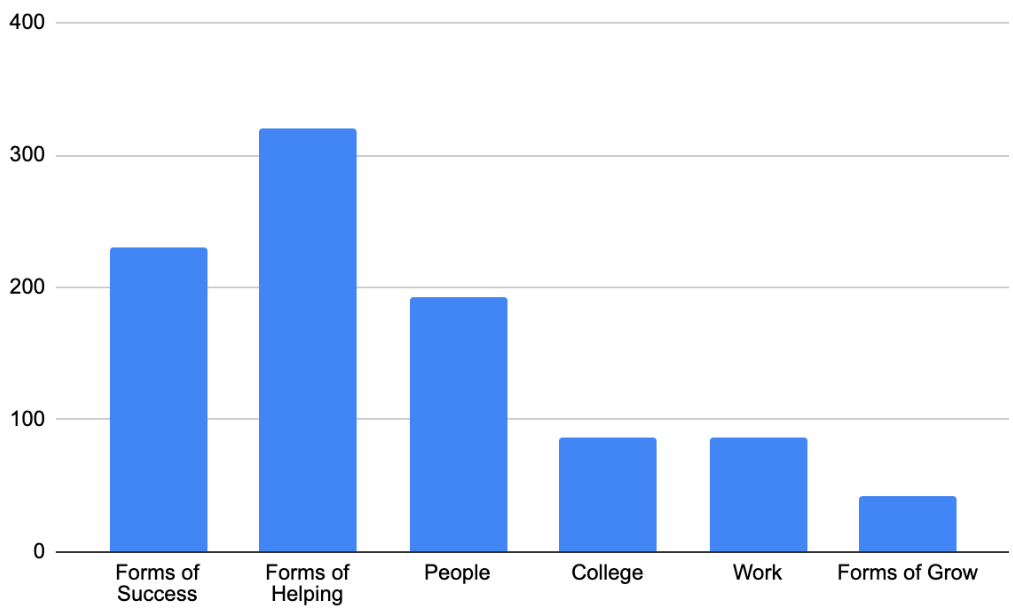
Goals, Habits, Growth

Every interviewee identified the Success Program motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth* as meaningful to them, although two of the eight said that it did not take on meaning until after high school. When asked what from the Success Program was most influential to their success, one interviewee discussed how they have continued to use goals, habits, growth in their daily life. “Since I was 17 I’ve had this goal journal that I write all my goals in for the year out on and keep working through those…. I literally just turned 21 and I just set my goals for when I turned 22 a few weeks ago” (Participant 1). Another student reflects that before participating in the Success Program, they “had more of a fixed mindset. I used to really tear myself down if I messed up on anything or got a bad grade. Just being able to change that mindset so I could grow…Being able to set goals I knew I could reach really helped my confidence" (Participant 3).

In tracking the most used words in the interviews, success was used 165 times. The word successful was used an additional 65 times, for a total of 230 uses of forms of the word *success*. Help/helping/helped/helpful were also used frequently, for a total of 320 times.

Figure 5

Most Used Terms in Interviews



Helping Others

One area not anticipated by the researcher was that half of the participants, four out of eight, discussed helping other people as an important component of the Success Program. One interviewee stated that an aspect about the program they loved is that "they give back" (Participant 2). Participant two desired to "push it forward." Giving back to others introduced one interviewee to "a different way of living. It gave [the student] some perspective" (Participant 5) One interviewee indicated that through the Success Program they received "help passing on help to other people so [they] could continue to help" (Participant 1) When later asked how they would continue to use what they've learned as part of the Success Program, the same interviewee answered,

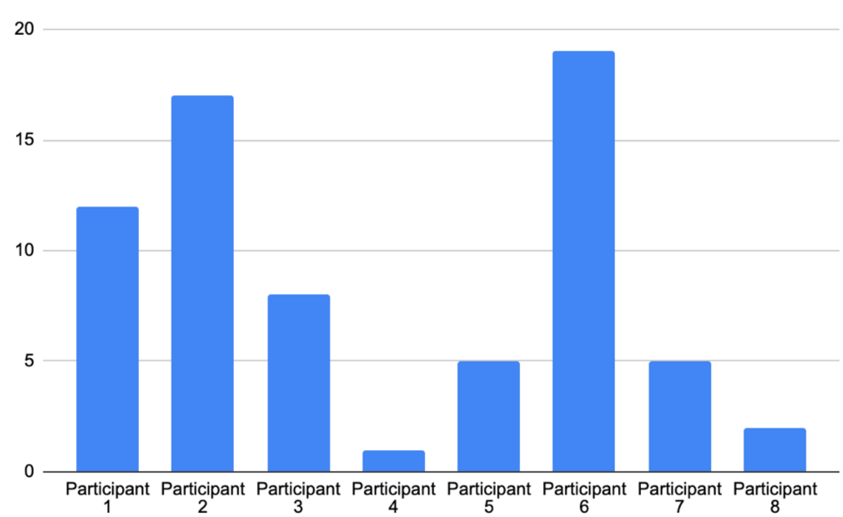
> Helping low-income people. Helping people who are first-generation college students. Because I see that as the path to breaking the chain of poverty that is so prevalent in society…. It's seeing someone doing the work that we should all be doing. (Participant 1)

Relationships

Relationships also indicated success. Every student interviewed identified school staff members as an important part of their success. Names of specific individuals varied, but names were mentioned between four and twenty-one times in each interview. Seven out of eight participants mentioned the name of the director of the program as a reason for their success, with his name appearing an average of 4.875 times per interview.

Figure 6

Number of Staff Mentioned by Name

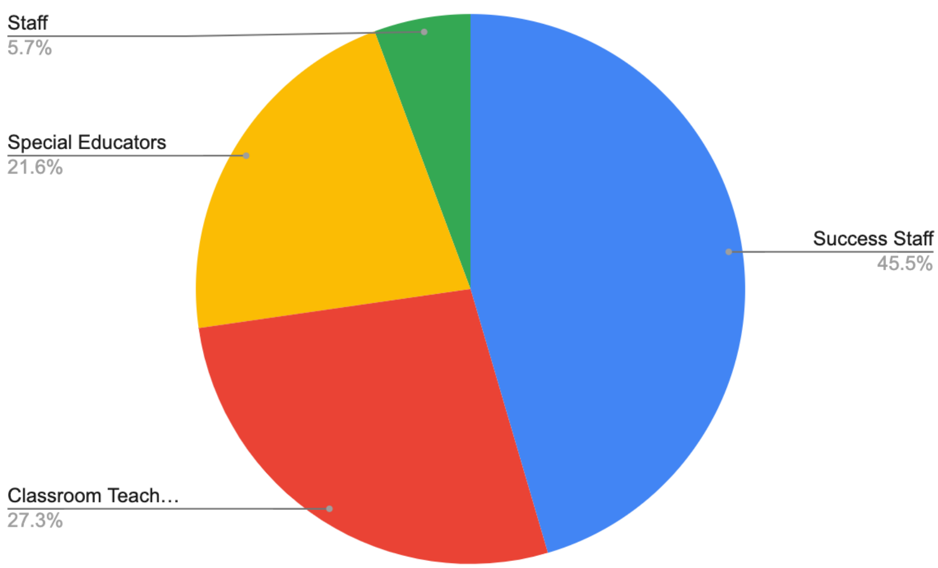


Out of the five individuals who had access to a Special Educator, all five also mentioned their Special Educator by name as a reason for their success. Out of these five individuals, the name of their Special Educator was mentioned an average of 3.8 times. One specific Special Educator was named by four of the five individuals. Given that no questions were asked about Special Education and many were asked about the Success Program, these numbers are high, indicating strong relationship building between Special Educators and their students within the Success Program. One interviewee named her special educator her "mentor" (Participant 8)

In total, twenty-two staff members at the school were mentioned by name as contributing to student success. Out of these twenty-two, sixteen are teachers, which includes three special educators. Six individuals were staff members, including both Success Program leaders.

Figure 7

Category of Staff Mentioned by Name

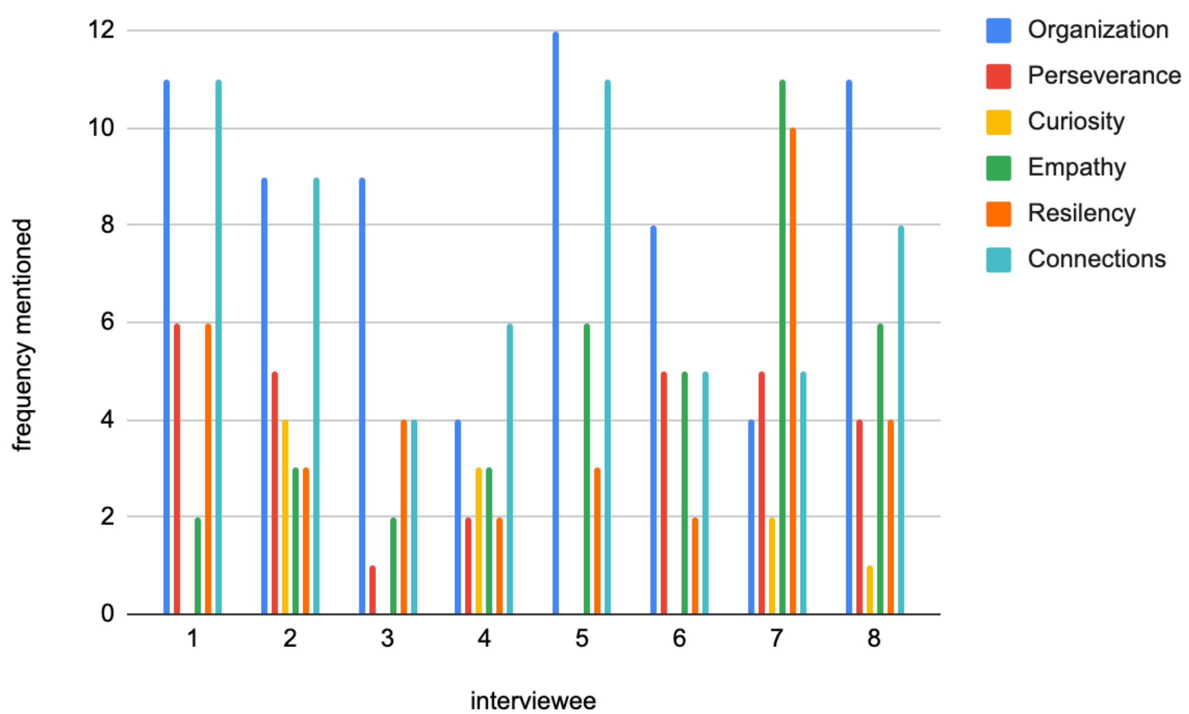


Traits of Success

Participants were asked multiple questions from various angles about why they were successful in high school. While students used various terminology, their resulting answers fell into six broad categories: Organization, Perseverance, Curiosity, Empathy, Resiliency and Connections. All eight individuals discussed organization, empathy, resiliency, and connections as key components of their success. Perseverance was discussed by seven people and curiosity was discussed by four individuals. In examining how often each trait arose, organization was discussed an average of 8.5 times per interview, connections 7.375 times, empathy 4.75 times, resiliency 4.25 times, perseverance 3.5 times, and curiosity 1.25 times. While curiosity was the least discussed, the other five categories could be considered the indicators of success for students, with organization holding the most weight of the five.

Figure 8

Success Traits



Participants indicated that some of these traits were directly taught, either through the classes or through meetings with the head of the program. One alumnus said that when they were struggling, they would go to the program head.

> He would really kind of give me different options. He'd be like, we'd do this. Or this could be a way we could go at it. Or we could do this… 'Cause I remember when there were a lot of times when I'd be like, I'm losing it. I'm at my breaking point. He would just sit me down and we'd talk about it. And he'd come up with all these different ideas, and I'd be like, how'd you do that? It really helped me be like, 'Ok. I need to start taking a deep breath and thinking about what my options are and what to do'. (Participant 7)

The process of how to make logical decisions was modeled for the student, going along with the direct instruction that was happening in the classroom. Another student identified that the direct instruction of planning, particularly around the motto *Goals, Habits, Growth* was the reason for their success in college. This student is dyslexic but said that the classroom teaching "helped inspire me to read books like *Grit* and *Growth Mindset*" and "made me fall in love with reading books" (Participant 1).

Organization

Organization was directly taught along with the *Goals, Habits, Growth* motto. One alumnus discussed how they still use the organized structure of the motto in their current line of work.

> Anytime I go to do any project, I have to break it down in some way and this is the big goal and this is how we're going to get there. What are the habits and how will we say we've achieved the goal. And if we don't completely achieve the goal, where did we get to? … This is what we'll need to check off to do it and this is how we'll either say we've

achieved the goal or we didn't completely achieve it but this is what we did achieve. (Participant 5)

Perseverance and Resiliency

Perseverance and resiliency were described more frequently than directly discussed in the interviews. For instance, one alumnus described the abuse in their family in high school, resulting in divorce and a drastic change in economic status. When asked about what they are doing now, this alumnus' response was that they were "loving life" (Participant 6). The individual worked through bullying and the loss of friendships through hard work and connections with adults. The student directly tied their current employment success to the Success Program, which not only allowed the individual to get career experiences during high school, but also "hooked [them] up with two job opportunities that ended up being [their] start and getting [them] a lot of experience." "The Success Program definitely helped me get my start there for sure and helped me get my foot in the door." This individual believes that the skill that best helped them to find success was "persevering through everything and not giving up" (Participant 6)

Another alumnus showed resiliency through family alcoholism that resulted in living away from their parents for periods of time, as well as being bullied at school for having a father in jail and "two lesbo moms" (Participant 7). This interviewee referred to all the above mentioned as "a lot of stuff that really pushed me…. I don't want to be like that… I don't need alcohol to consume me."

Individuals discussed their ability to persevere through advocating for themselves, which was a skill they learned through the Success Program. One alumnus said that they "became really good at advocating for myself and telling people, *This is what I need*" (Participant 7).

The program taught perseverance through using team-building exercises like a ropes course. One alumnus recalled working with a partner on the ropes course. Both students were "freaking out and we kind of looked at each other and were like, 'We can do this. What are we freaking out about? Let's just get to the top.' And we did" (Participant 7).

Empathy

Empathy was also directly taught in meaningful ways that could translate to real world situations. One interviewee discussed the Prep for Success class. "Having that class and having the people that I did, that helped out a lot and kind of pushed me to get used to kind of working with others. Because now that I have my job now, I still have to work with others and now I have the skills and stuff to kind of be like, 'Ok. Like, you need to hear them out. You need to hear their ideas and kind of compromise', and I feel like also that class really taught me how to compromise" (Participant 7).

Empathy was also taught in relation to oneself. One interviewee recalled watching *The Masks We Wear* and discussing "the way we mentally treat ourselves negatively impacts the people around us" (Participant 1). This student found it so meaningful that the student "remembers it 7 years later."

Empathy played a role in teamwork, which was a skill that was actively taught in the program. Participant Seven commented that the program was

> Just different then your regular classes… learning how to do all the teamwork and the trust and the bonding. Just putting it into my real life…. Using those things in my real life… helped a lot. I don't think I would have been as successful as I am today. I just feel like it would have gone completely in the other direction, and it would have been bad.

Connections

The importance of connections is clear through the tagline of the director's email: "It takes a village." One interviewee discussed just knowing that there were adults in the program there if they were needed was "like having a card in your pocket" (Participant 4). Additionally, participants talked about their teachers in powerful ways. "They kind of had my back" was Participant Three's memory of their teachers. Participant Two recalls that although their parents may not have been supportive, their teachers "were adults in my life that I could turn to for support." Beyond that, connections with other students in the program were also discussed. One interviewee emphasized the trust based on a strong foundation of friendship that they developed through the Success Program and the mental health support that it provided.

> Mental health is a big thing to be successful. If you don't have good mental health or strong support and a strong background, you can lose focus very fast and most people give up on their dreams because they don't have that pillar of support. (Participant 2)

Participant Five pointed out that much of high school learning is from their peers. When asked what helped them to be successful, they answered,

> Kids who were in the actual course. They were pretty helpful in making me who I was as a person… every kid is a sponge soaking up everything around them. They don't soak up everything from their teacher. They soak up some stuff, but they soak up everything with the group they are in. (Participant 5)

The combination of connections with staff and students in the program created a safe space, leading one interviewee to say that "I feel safe in that environment" despite their accent and disability (Participant 8). Another called it a "safe space" to go when their home life was filled with abuse (Participant 6). Another alumnus referred to it as "a little family that you have in school" (Participant 7).

This safe environment also did not push a singular track post-graduation. Interestingly, the words *college* and *work* showed up almost the same number of times in the totality of the interviews, 87 and 86 times, respectfully.

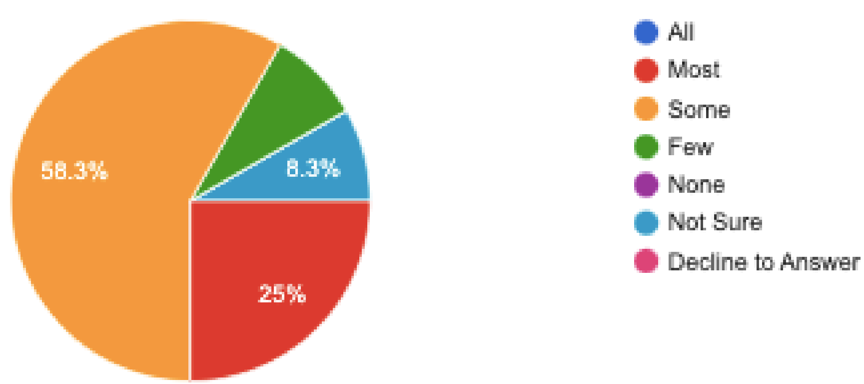
Teacher understanding of *Success*

In addition to the interviews, a survey of teachers to gauge their understandings of the term *success* was sent out. The survey given to faculty was sent out in a faculty newsletter. Twelve staff members responded to the anonymous survey. It was sent out to faculty members of the whole school, not just the Student Success Program, and its questions were asked about their students in general, not just about the students in this program.

In the survey of faculty, when asked how many of their students have set goals for their education, 25% answered *Most* and 58.3% answered *Some*.

Figure 9

How many of your students have set goals for their education?



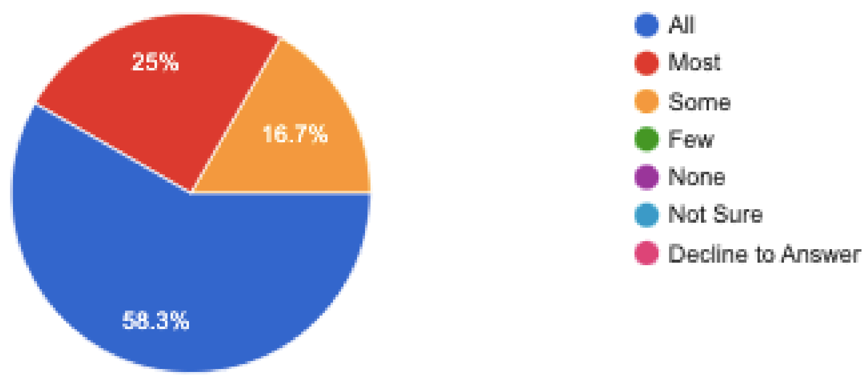
When faculty was asked how many of their students have the ability to succeed academically, 58.3% answered that all their students have the ability to succeed academically. 25% answered that most of their students have this ability and 16.7% of their students have this ability. This contrasts with the students themselves, who indicated high degrees of growth, despite their backgrounds, and an expectation of themselves that they would grow. One student who grew up in an alcoholic family was able to connect the growth mindset to the motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth*. Before joining the Success Program, they said that,

> In my head, change was always this really complex thing where I saw years of cycles of alcoholism destroying my family and change looked like this impossible thing. Then we were able to break it down so much so that you set a goal and that's what we focus on. And then we put the habits in place that are going to lead to that goal. You keep moving up and you're going to grow. There's not an option to not grow. That framework… I didn't have to rethink of the Success Program to remember that framework. It is just part of how my brain works now. (Participant 1)

Another student outgrew their own demographics as a person of color with a learning disability and is in their last year of college. They reflect that "growth brought me to the next level, which is the college level. I still have that room to grow even more though. I feel like I still can grow. I'm not really done yet" (Participant 8). Each interviewee discussed their own growth and the meaningful connection made between their growth and the motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth*, however this same connection is not shared by all faculty members. This is particularly concerning given the cultural stigma connecting with students in poverty with low academic performance.

Figure 10

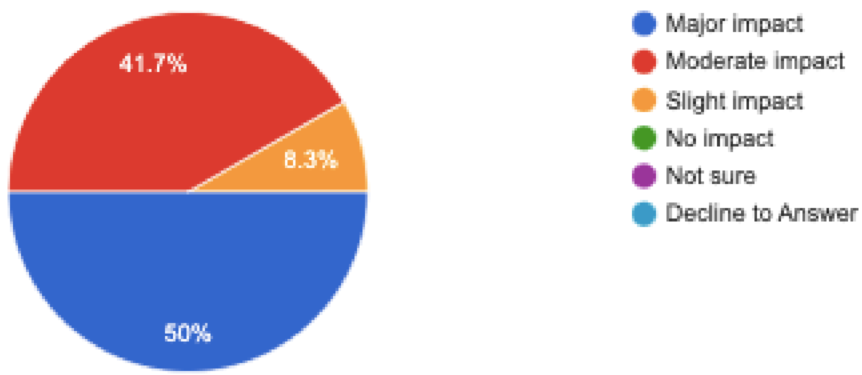
How Many of your Students have the Ability to Succeed Academically?



Teachers were split on whether setting high expectations for all students would have a significant impact on improving student achievement, with 33.3% indicating a major impact, 41.7% moderate impact, and 25% slight impact. However, teachers reported stronger projected impact resulting from a school culture where students feel responsible and accountable for their own education, with 50% indicating that this culture would have a major impact, 41.7% moderate impact, and only 8.3% slight impact. No one indicated that it would have no impact, was unsure, or declined to answer. Providing all students with core reading, writing and math skills also had a strong response, with 50% of teachers reporting that this would have a major impact and 41.7% reporting a moderate projected impact. Teachers also showed that they believed that connecting classroom instruction to the real world would have a major impact, with 58.3% of teachers reporting this need. Finally, with the highest amount of impact, 100% of teachers agreed that addressing the individual needs of diverse learners would have either a major (58.3%) or moderate (41.7) impact.

Figure 11

How much of an impact would a school culture where students feel responsible and accountable for their own education have on improving student achievement?

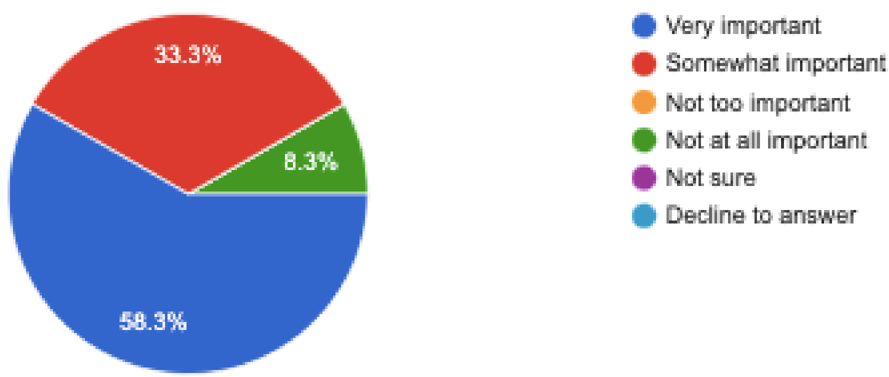


Additionally, teachers were asked a series of questions about what is important to student achievement. 91.7% of teachers responded that having adequate public funding and support for education was very important. One aspect of this case study is that it is not publicly funded, but privately funded through donations. This leads to the program being funded above the ability of many public schools. The ability of public schools being able to fund a program of this type is in question.

75% of teachers found addressing the needs of students who are English Language Learners was very important. 66.7% thought that having access to integrated social, health and educational services for students and families was very important. Strengthening ties among schools and parents had a response of 58.3% believing it was very important, but it was the only answer that had any responses that indicated that it was not at all important (8.3%). Every interviewee mentioned their family, whether biological or adopted, as part of the interview, indicating that family is important for the students themselves. In fact, the words *family, mom, dad,* or *parents* showed up a total of 144 times in the interviews.

Figure 12

How much of an impact would strengthening ties among schools and parents have on improving student achievement?



58.3% of faculty believed that having opportunities for students for learning beyond the classroom and school building were important; the same number of teachers (58.3%) indicated that preparing students for competition and collaboration in a global economy was important.

Target Journal and Rationale

The above research findings are condensed to 4500-5500 words for submission to the *Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress* (JUMP). This journal publishes theoretical and empirically based research articles relevant to underrepresented populations. One area in which the editors encourage the submission of manuscripts is in education.

JUMP is an appropriate journal for this research for various reasons. First, the above research focuses on a program aimed at students in poverty, which matches the aim of JUMP. Second, JUMP has a rigorous peer review process, giving credence to the articles written within.

Third, JUMP promptly publish**es** work, with two yearly submission deadlines. Fourth, their audience is multidisciplinary. Since the approach to th**is** case study us**es** a positive deviance method, its audience could be broader. This method is niche, and users of this method frequently cite studies in other fields to give authority to the method itself. A journal limited to education alone may not reach all interested in the method.

The final two reasons to publish in JUMP are related to access. JUMP is open access without payment required by the author. Many other open access journals require payment to publish. In fact, an alternative was a journal called Deviant Behavior. However, after examining its criteria, the cost of $3500 to publish an article was prohibitive. Additionally, JUMP uses Google Scholar Indexing, which is a common method to access scholarly articles. Both open access and Google Scholar Indexing will allow the work to be more widely viewed.

The criteria for submission to JUMP include APA 7th edition, using URLs for references when available. It is double spaced, using a 12-point font, uses italics instead of underlining, and all tables, etc. are placed within the text rather than at the end. It must be submitted in Microsoft Word, and it must be related to minority and/or underrepresented populations and be between 4500-5500 words.

The manuscript itself must have no author's identity. Instead, a separate title page, not included in the manuscript, is provided with each contributor's name, institutional affiliation, email and a short bio.

When reviewed, the reviewer is asked if the paper contributes to the body of knowledge contributing to social justice, as well as whether it helps educators know the underrepresented in teaching and learning. The guidelines for subject treatment include sufficient evidence, accurate and consistent, clear and detailed descriptions, and a title that reflect the content of the article.

Finally, the presentation needs to be clearly written, organized logically, and appropriate and sufficient APA references. The journal article to be submitted to JUMP is in the Appendix.

Section 5: Practitioner Contribution

Introduction to the Practitioner Contribution

Case studies offer a holistic review, rather than a snapshot, of a topic and can explore the factors that contribute to this case in detail (McLeod, 2019). Bennett and Elmann (2010) argue that case studies offer the most advantage if they are comparative, such as deviant cases like this research. The goal of these inductive processes is to generate new hypotheses, whether they are particular to the individual case or generalizable. (Bennett and Elman (2010). While a common criticism of case studies is that they cannot be generalized (McLeod, 2019), it is important to note the difference between statistical and analytical generalization. While it may not be appropriate to generalize a single case study statistically or to test a theory using a single case study, analytically generalizing in the process of theory-building is more appropriate (Gerring, 2004). Additionally, Yin (2009) assigns singular case studies the role of building theory. Therefore, the suggestions for practice are based on new theories created out of this research. The theories need further testing and the contributions to practice should be paired with other case studies for validation.

Practitioner Contribution

One area of consideration for programming based on the results of this case study is the connection of cohorts based on demographic information. Two students valued that the program had the same kind of people as themselves and spoke of the comfort that brought them. It is interesting to note that these two students also identified themselves as low income. One consideration for practice is to identify smaller cohorts of individuals around demographic information and have these cohorts meet regularly. Smaller cohorts who may share similar issues, such as race, economic status, family alcoholism, or LGBTQ, may encourage the connections indicated as important by all students. Additionally, if a different staff member who also shares that demographic identifier runs these smaller cohort meetings, it could encourage the diversity of relationships found in this research and ensure that a program is not built around one individual, such as a program director.

The level of engagement with the Success Program was high among participants. The research suggests that encouraging students to continue engaging with the program after their initial touchpoint is an area to focus on. When schools establish programming, the scope and sequence of this programming should be considered in its entirety. All eight participants attended the transitional Success Camp, which has high buy-in among students and many of the participants expressed that it was fun. However, this research indicates that the level of long-term success based on this transition event alone is not enough. Ensuring that future touch points are diverse, fulfilling several needs, could help with this engagement. The two classes were discussed positively by all alumnus who took them, with multiple stories of skills learned and growth achieved. Continuing courses to teach the five identified areas of organization, perseverance, empathy, resiliency, and connections are supported through this research.

Students applying for grants and following through with attendance at events or programs indicated areas of passion for successful students. Early identification of passion projects, along with grant writing, could be built into coursework. This may best be paired with understanding a growth mindset, as students may learn that they are not as passionate about an area as first believed.

Given that 100% of participants identified Goals, Habits, Growth as meaningful and that staff also indicated that students taking responsibility for their learning would lead to high academic growth, this framework has universality and applicability for other programs geared towards first-generation college students. Additionally, this framework could be further emphasized within the larger context of the case study, as 58.3% of teachers answered that only some of their students had set educational goals. The specific instruction of *Goals, Habits, Growth* that is taught in the Prep for Success and Prep for College classes, could be applied more universally, not only within the context of this case study, but throughout educational institutions.

The disconnect between 100% of successful participants commitment to a growth mindset and that 41.7% of teachers believe that not all their students have the ability to succeed academically additionally shows that more professional development work could focus on growth mindset. While the Success Program focuses on student growth, the larger context of the school could also focus on staff growth in this area. Each interviewee discussed their own growth and the meaningful connection made between their growth and the motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth*, however this same connection is not shared by all faculty members. This is particularly concerning given the cultural stigma connecting with students in poverty with low academic performance. Professional development that unpacks unconscious bias along with growth-mindset work with adults could improve a culture of wrap-around support.

The role of giving back was unexpected by the researcher. No question specifically addressed it, although the researcher ended her interviews thanking the interviewee, who frequently indicated that they did the interview to give back to the Success Program. One interviewee said she “just wanted to pay it forward” by participating (Participant 6). This desire to give back is connected to the role of relationships in achieving success. The way students felt supported is the feeling they want to give to others. Implications for this include tying community service into passion projects and making sure community service is meaningful for the individual. This could be achieved through giving to an organization that is represented in the student's mind by an individual who has either helped them or who they are strongly connected to. The grounding of giving in relationships rather than the abstract idea of others could lead to an increase in giving, as indicated through this research.

There are also programmatic recommendations based on the strong connection between special educators and participants. One recommendation is that the Special Education department collaborates more directly with the Success Program to align goals and identify needs. A second recommendation is more universal. Programs for first-generation students could pair with special educators because many of the skills taught overlap. For instance, *Goals, Habits, Growth*, as a motto, is an example of executive functioning skills, which are skills that many special educators directly teach to their students. In this way, the connections that participants made between themselves and special educators could be part of the structure instead of a happy accident. One interviewee, when asked what skills helped them to find success in high school, mentioned "maximizing as much as possible all the help I got" (Participant 3) This student took advantage of both a Study Skills class, with a four-year relationship with a special educator, and the Success Program. Later, the same student talked about the monthly meetings that were a part of the Success Program. They said that the meetings were an

> opportunity to advocate for yourself. It was a structured time to say,' I'm really doing a bad job in this class. I need a lot of help.' And that would get the ball rolling on how to get that person help to be successful… It wasn't so much what I did during those meetings because I had the study skills class and I was already doing that with [Name of special educator]. (Participant 4)

This alumnus experience indicates overlap in the fulfillment of the goals of the Success Program and the goals of the IEP. Ensuring that any overlap is deliberate through planning and joint goal setting could lead to more effective strategies.

More universally, this research could be used to suggest that teams come together to talk about students, rather than having content-specific teams alone. The benefit of this could be not only ensuring less overlap, or at least more deliberate overlap, but also increased empathy for student experiences and improved relationships with students.

Finally, the findings of the role of connections in finding success, in this case with the program director or with a special educator, suggests a model in which a relationship is built over a multi-year period. In this case, there was the same program director for all four years of high school for each of the participants, and, for those who were on IEPs, the same special educator for four years. This system could be achieved more universally through an advisory system that is closely connected to skill building. What both the special educators and the program director have in common that an advisor does not is that the special educators and program director often, if not always, had their students in a class and therefore is working with them on specific skills.

The five main indicators of success - organization, perseverance, empathy, resiliency, and connections - could be the organizational framework for any programming to increase academic success, as they were the indicators identified by the participants. Knowing these indicators could encourage program leaders, or teachers of courses in this area, to directly teach these skills.

Additionally, these five main indicators of success could become the rubric by which a program could be evaluated. Further study is needed to see if correlations exist between different definitions of success and these five indicators. Additionally, further case studies in various educational environments are needed to indicate the universality of these categories. However, the program studied could begin to build rubrics around these areas to self-evaluate their own program.

Since every interviewee mentioned their family, with an average of eighteen times each, their connection to their families appears important. This is at odds with the faculty response with only 58.3% believing strengthening ties between schools and parents was very important and 8.3% believing that it was not at all important. This suggests that there is a lack of buy-in on the part of faculty in the area of school-parent relationships. Increased professional development around this topic, along with specific guidelines around expectations of parental contact could be established.

Plan for Dissemination

While the actual results of this study will be most interesting to the subject of the case study, the method of the study and the implications for using positive deviance to identify alternative definitions of success has far wider possibilities. The dissemination of this work will both pay respect to the site of the case study and showcase a more universal application to a wider audience.

In disseminating this research to the site of the study, an executive summary will be given to the school's administration, Board of Trustees, and the Success Program directors. The researcher will additionally offer to present the results at a faculty/staff meeting.

In a more universal context, a professional development series on how to use positive deviance to develop alternative evaluations of success may reach a more interested audience. The series could begin with identifying problems with traditional definitions of success, such as standardized testing and GPAs. It will then move into how using qualitative methods can offer alternative definitions of success. This case study will be used as the exemplar. Finally, possibilities of what could be done with the findings would be offered, although this is beyond the scope of the dissertation.

The first step would be to choose a conference to present at locally to garner interest. The Rowland Foundation annual conference has workshops that fit this need. It is the largest educational conference in the state of Vermont. Presenting at this conference in October of 2023 would allow the researcher to give an overview of the process, gain interest, and use that to advertise for a professional development series. Ideally, the series would be a class that could be taken for professional development credit, but also for educational credit. Castleton University might be open to this idea.

The professional development series will be based on a workshop method, where those taking the series would need to do their own mini positive deviant case study, which could be done on a small scale within one classroom. The goal of the series would be less to disseminate the results of this dissertation, but to give a realistic example of alternative definitions of success and how to go about finding those definitions using a positive deviance approach. The main universal appeal of this research is a possible alternative to the standardized test scores approach that is traditionally used in education.

Section Six: Practitioner Reflection

Summary of the Inquiry

Personal Learning, Shifts, and Transformations to your work related to the Focus of Practice

If Carter and Welner (2013) transfer our attention from achievement gaps to opportunity gaps, and therefore from outcomes to inputs, scholars then need to examine the inputs to see where discrepancies lie. One such input is cultural capital, defined as informal education transmitted through the family, cultural groups, religion, political parties, etc. Schools often confused two types of indicators, as spelled out by Carter (2013): "(1) cultural markers that often have little to do with a person's interest in achievement and success, and (2) cultural markers used by school officials to designate intelligent and competent students" (144). Educators tend to define groups’ cultures as either oppositional to or congruous with doing well in school. The stereotypes associated with low-income, racial and ethnic minority students are directly related to these same students' cultural capital. Instead of recognizing the diverse interests, language, speech, types of interactions and tastes as assets, schools are instead deeming them as signs of a lack of motivation.

Some cultural capital can be converted to educational success, yet not all. Our society deems some types of cultural capital to be important, usually that of the highbrow, white culture, while other types of cultural capital, such as that of black, American Indians, and Hispanic cultures, are rejected as unimportant to educational success.

Jaeger and Breen (2016) argue that privileged children convert their cultural capital into educational success and that educational success promotes social reproduction. While Jaeger and

Breen (2016) argue that some kids are privileged with cultural capital and others are not, a more nuanced argument is that some parents teach their kids the privileged cultural capital while others teach non-privileged cultural capital. This nuance recognizes that all kids have cultural capital, but that only some of the cultural capital is accepted in schools. Other types of cultural capital are more accepted in other areas of society, but schools tend to accept only white, middle class cultural capital.

One explanation for the acceptance of only white, middle/upper class cultural capital is the preponderance of white teachers. In 2017-2018, 79% of public-school teachers were white and non-Hispanic (Spiegelman, 2020). When there is a cultural mismatch between the race of the teacher and the race of a student, the students are disadvantaged because of the educators' lack of understanding of the students' social/cultural background. This is not an even playing field. The culture of power in schools is the cultural capital (Carter, 2013). According to Valenzuela (1999), schools focus on the differences between cultures, labeling anything that is not white, middle-class as deviant.

Race is not the only cultural mismatch. Low socioeconomic status (SES) and minority youth found their greatest difficulties in the classrooms of high-SES teachers of all races (Alexander et al. 1987). High-SES teachers rated their classrooms of low-SES students lower: less mature, less likely to achieve, and exceptionally low on school-climate measures. The results of the teachers' ratings are seen in the students' grades and test scores. The mismatch between teachers' belief in students' ability to grow found in this study with the students' own belief in their success is evidence of this phenomenon.

Interestingly, Jaeger and Breen (2016) recognize that the conversion of cultural capital only matters in a school with others who have money, as is the situation in this case study. A school with primarily low-income students does not favor students with cultural capital. However, this brings up the question of whether the schools merely don't favor the students with highbrow cultural capital or if the schools favor students with different types of cultural capital. Additionally, schools with primarily students of color are more likely to have more teachers of color than majority white schools, giving a greater weight to the cultural capital of students of color. However, in majority black schools, only 36% of teachers are also black and in majority Hispanic schools, only 33% of teachers are Hispanic (Spiegelman, 2020). While this is a greater percentage than majority white schools, it is still not a large enough percentage to ensure that the cultures of the students of color become the cultures of power.

For some groups of students, stereotypes associated with their ethnicity benefit them. For instance, Jennifer Lee (2012) shows that Asian students benefit from the perception of their high motivation and academic skills; she has labeled this "stereotype promise.” For other students, schooling becomes a process that reduces the chances of mobility because their culture is ignored or even vilified, further widening the opportunity gap.

The consequence goes deeper than widening the opportunity gap; it creates a ceiling of learning that ignores science. According to Gandara (2013), students who maintain or embrace their bicultural identities have more positive academic, psychological and social attainment than those with only one culture. Additionally, cognitive neuroscience research shows that Alzheimer's disease can be delayed through the regular use of two languages. Schools, by favoring only one type of cultural capital, are producing culturally inflexible students. Instead, schools could promote cultural flexibility in their students, encouraging their ability to navigate different cultural settings themselves. Ironically, it may be the very lack of cultural flexibility of previous generations of teachers and schools that taught the current teachers and administrators to be culturally inflexible that has led to the current phenomenon of monoculture. At the school where the researcher is currently employed, there has been a tripling of Hispanic students over the past year. This doctoral journey has given the researcher the reflective ability, along with the research skills, to recognize this as an opportunity to increase our cultural flexibility rather than a problem to fix.

Teachers have a great deal of power at schools, and their judgments of students' noncognitive abilities, such as their social and cultural capital, have significant effects on their evaluation of these students. Teachers are cultural gatekeepers, rewarding students with the right cultural capital and punishing those with the wrong cultural capital (Carter, 2013). Much of this rewarding and punishing goes unnoticed, as it is affected by stereotypes and preconceived notions rather than proven facts about one culture being better than another. The results of this case study, along with the doctoral work of the past three years, can allow the researcher to help staff navigate recognition of teachers' role in determining cultural capital.

Personal Learning, Shifts and Transformations for you as an Educational Leader

The introduction to Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) through this doctoral program fundamentally altered the researcher's outlook. The key to POS is not only *what* POS is but *how* to achieve it within an organization. One method is through meaning-making (Wrzesniewski, 2011) within the workplace, which has been shown by Bono et al. (2011) to lead to positive outcomes. Wrzesniewski (2011) uses the term "calling" to refer to meaning making, defining it as "a sense that the work has a positive impact on the world and is intrinsically motivating as an end in itself" (p. 48). Meaning making is an important aspect of authentic leadership as well. Kernis (2003) theorized four core aspects of authentic leadership: awareness of the self, transparent relationships, a moral code, and a balanced approach to processing. These skills all require self-transcendent values, such as honesty, loyalty, and equality. Leaders who espouse these values have identified a higher purpose to their work and their relationships. According to Kernis, an authentic leader will, through interactions with other members of their organization, develop authentic followers, or people who have developed authenticity in themselves through interaction with the leader. This relationship is symbiotic, as the increased authenticity in the followers leads to higher levels of authenticity in the leader. Leading through meaning-making, particularly using the symbolic, has been a journey the researcher has been on since moving into the role of an administrator for the 2021-2022 school year.

Another method to achieve POS in an organization is through identity-forming to increase resilience (Caza & Milton, 2011), hope (Carlsen et al., 2011), and self-discovery (Hall & Las Heras, 2011). Additionally, by encouraging positive deviance (Lavine, 2011), or acting outside of the accepted norms through encouraging psychological safety, employees can find their voices (Nembhand & Edmondson, 2011), and ideas for change can benefit from grassroots support. This differs from traditional methods, which focus on top-down approaches to organizational change. In the researcher's new role as assistant principal, a main goal is to create psychological safety through inclusion in the decision-making process.

POS also encourages leadership to create methods to facilitate positivity in organizations. One of the goals is to have an organization share an understanding of a symbolized future (Ford & Ford, 1995). This can be done through appreciative inquiry, which assumes that the organization is a living network and works to bring out the positive core of the organization by asking questions about what is most valued and most desired (Cooperrider & Srivastrva, 1987; Quinn & Wellman, 2011). Additionally, positive deviance may be searched for, observed, and spread by leaders (Pascale et al., 2010). This represents a radical shift from the leadership model that searches out problems to eradicate. It fits with Cooperrider and Godwin's (2011) introduction of innovation-inspired positive organization development (IPOD), which outlined a three-stage approach to innovation rather than problem solving. These stages are: "the elevation-and-extension of strengths, the broadening-and-building of capacity, and the establishment of the new-and-eclipsing of the old" (Cooperrider & Godwin, 2011, p. 737). Together, these methods of change assist in increasing the ratio of positive to negative emotions. Losada (2004) observed 60 management teams in simulated settings and coded every statement teams made. The teams were divided ahead of time into three groups- high performance, mixed performance, and low performance. Losada found that the high-performance teams had positivity ratios as high as 6:1, higher connectivity to each other, and were far more flexible than other groups. The middle teams had much lower positivity ratios and were not as resilient. The low-performing teams had 1:1 positivity ratio and lost all creative flexibility. Losada's study shows the effectiveness of positive leadership and the need to use the methods of appreciative inquiry, encouraging positive deviance, and a focus on innovation. Being a positive force within the school is a key role the researcher plays in the leadership team. Knowing when and how to deliver constructive feedback, particularly through emphasizing the positive results of behavior the researcher would like to encourage is a skill she will continue to work at and employ.

Personal Learning, Shifts, and Transformations for you as a Scholar

Social justice is about changing systems for the purpose of righting a societal wrong, to balance out power imbalances. Working to increase the achievement of students in poverty has been a career goal of the researcher. Her first teaching job was in Chelmsford, MA, an area known for its racial divide as well as its poverty levels. In graduate school she attended weekly "wine and cheese" discussion groups at Jonathan Kozol's home with other education students who cared deeply about the issue of poverty in schools. Her student-teaching work was at *Full Circle High School*. When students were kicked out of *Somerville High School* in Massachusetts for behavioral issues, they were sent to the alternative school, *Full Circle*; these students were frequently living below the poverty line.

Kozol's work, particularly *Savage Inequalities* (1991), started the researcher on the path of social justice. His reference to America's schools as "apartheid schools" in *Shame of a Nation* (2005) gave her a new lens with which to see her classroom and school. These were the basis of her later work in the creation of the Success Program, the subject of this case study. The goal of creating the program was never to create a separate space next to the main school; the goal was to change the culture and climate of the school itself. The researcher wanted to shift the organizational culture of her school. Fabionar (2020) points out that to shift the culture, one must understand and navigate it. During the first two years of the implementation of the program, the school brought in guest speakers who got to the heart of why it was important to talk about poverty. While Ruby Payne's (2003) scholarship is controversial, her message that there is a cultural difference between poverty and the middle class, with differing norms, values and beliefs, influenced our school's work. The school staff worked towards understanding these cultural differences through self-reflection and discussion. This was a main lever towards a change in pedagogy (Fabionar, 2020).

Other levers (Fabionar, 2020) used to create this shift in culture was an advisory board that helped create the final suggestions to the school. Although the work came out of a sabbatical, the researcher's first act upon receiving the sabbatical was to create an advisory board made up of many of those she thought would be unsupportive of the work. The researcher chose to do this with the hope that she would receive their buy-in because they were part of the creation of the solution. Putting the governance in the heads of a wide variety of stakeholders brought both new voices to the table and gave the final suggestions a base of support. Finally, the creation of the Success Program gave a supportive network to students in poverty within the school. In this way, the project hit all four of Fabionar's (2020) levers.

Social justice continued to be a base for the researcher, as she used a positive deviance approach to examine the definition of success in the Success Program. However, positive deviance falls under the rather recent theory of educational leadership, positive organizational leadership, coined by Cooperrider, which is based on positive psychology. One of the main critiques of positive organizational scholarship is that it is naive, one of the arguments Chalmers (2021) makes in his article *Social Entrepreneurialism Solutionism Problem.* However, it is the very intractable nature of the role that poverty plays in education that makes a positive deviant approach appropriate.

Implications for the future

Further research is needed on the success of students who do not have a disability, since this study indicates that one element of success for students is the pairing with a special educator for four years. While it may be that the reason for this success for students with disabilities was the role of a four-year positive relationship with an adult at school, that theory needs to be researched further. Research into whether a four-year positive relationship with an adult at school for students without disabilities would also help narrow the possible interpretations of this finding. Also, research into the number of positive relationships with adults a student has in high school and the student's success would also help to better understand these results.

Further research is needed to indicate whether advisors who teach specific skills in a class setting to their advisees increase the relationship with their advisees. This suggestion comes out of the finding that students with disabilities discussed their relationships with their special educators frequently, while only one student discussed her advisor. (Her advisor also was the head of the Success Program.) One theory to be explored is whether the teaching of skills, and therefore the witness to struggles and growth, increases the positive relationship of a student and their mentor.

Further study is needed to see if correlations exist between different definitions of success and these five indicators. Additionally, further case studies in various educational environments are needed to indicate the universality of these categories.

Appendix A: Script for contacting potential participants via telephone

Hello. May I please speak to _________________?

Hi ________. This is Kendra LaRoche from Burr and Burton. How are you?

I’m in a doctoral program at Southern New Hampshire University and I need to do a research study as part of the program. Jason Pergament said he spoke to you about participating in the study. Am I correct that you were part of the Student Success Program while you were at BBA?

If no, thank them for their time and hang up.

If yes, continue...

We are researching why some students who were in poverty while at BBA found success at school. You have been identified by Jason and I as someone who was successful at BBA. Would you be willing to participate in an interview about how and why you were successful?

If no, thank them for their time and hang up.

If yes, continue....

Fantastic! I’d like to set up a time for the interview. It will last about an hour. I’ll audio record the interview. However, all information you give me will be reported separate from your name. You will not be mentioned at all in the final report. When would be a good time for us to meet for the interview?

(Set up interview time and place.)

That sounds great. If you have any questions between now and then, you can go ahead and call me. I’m calling from my cell, so you know how to get a hold of me.

Appendix B: Consent Form
Southern New Hampshire University Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form for Assessing the Impact of the Student Success Program

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Kendra LaRoche who is a doctoral candidate at Southern New Hampshire University.

You are invited to participate in a research study about why some students in poverty perform well in the Student Success Program.

You will be asked to answer interview questions that will take about an hour of your time. These questions will ask you about what contributed to your success.

The potential risk associated with this study is inconvenience.

If you have decided to participate in this project, please understand that your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time with no penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason with no penalty.

In addition, your individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting from this study. Your participation will be kept confidential. Your interview responses will be connected to a number, not a name. A master list of names and codes will be kept in a secure location as a word document that is not shared via email or the internet. Audio recordings will also be located in the same secure location as the master list, titled with the individual number, not your name. In the publication of this dissertation, no names of participants will be mentioned. At the conclusion of the study, all audio recordings and the master list will be destroyed. Research materials will be held for a period of no more than five years. The data collected will never be shared with any other researcher beyond what is publicly published.

If you have any questions regarding this project, you may contact the researcher at 802-735-3780. If you have questions regarding your rights as research participant or any concerns regarding this project, you may report them – confidentially, if you wish – to the UC Institutional Review Board Chairperson at IRB@snhu.edu or the COCE Institutional Review Board Chairperson at COCEIRB@snhu.edu.

A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research.

Signature of Participant: ________________________________ Date: _______________
IRB Approval Number: _________________ IRB Expiration Date: _________________

Appendix C: Permission to Conduct the Study

January 26, 2022

Southern New Hampshire University
School of Education
2500 North River Road
Manchester, NH 03106

To Whom it May Concern:

This letter serves to provide approval for Kendra LaRoche to conduct her doctoral research with graduates of Burr and Burton Academy. She has submitted her research study design, in the format of her Introduction to her Dissertation, and I approve her research study at Burr and Burton Academy.

Thank you,

Mark Tashjian
Head of School
Burr and Burton Academy

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1) Background information: Current status
    a) What are you doing now?
    b) What do you like about it?
    c) What do you believe helped you to get there?
2) Background information: Status as student
    a) Describe the family you grew up in
    b) What was school like for you in Middle School?
3) Participant's position in the student success program
    a) Describe how you participated in the Student Success Program
        i) What and when was your first interaction with the program?
        ii) Why do you think you were chosen to be part of the program?
        iii) Why did you chose to participate in the program?
        iv) What aspects of the Student Success Program did you participate in?
4) Teachable Traits
    a) What personal traits do you think helped you to find success in high school?
    b) What skills do you think helped you to find success in high school?
    c) How did school staff help you to be successful?
    d) How did other students help you to be successful?
5) Program Attributes
    a) What helped you to be successful in the Student Success Program?
    b) How was the structure of the Student Success Program helpful to you?
    c) Did the program motto of "Goals, Habits, Growth" take on meaning to you?

    d) How did ________ help you to be successful? (Based on the parts of the program participated in)
    e) Is there any other part of the program that you think was helpful to you being successful?

6) Reflection
    a) Looking at where you are at now, how did the Student Success Program help you to get there?
    b) How do you think you'll continue to use what you learned as part of the program in the future?

Appendix E: Journal Article Submission

Assessing the Impact of a Program for Students in Generational Poverty

Introduction

Despite the odds against them, some students in generational poverty perform well in school (Krashen, 2005). Singhal and Svenkerud (2018) argue that evidence-based innovations are usually outside-in, expert-driven approaches that ignore or reject local solutions; instead, they claim, scholars should focus more on practice-based evidence and using the local communal wisdom to solve problems. One way to examine practical, local solutions is to focus on positive deviance (PD). Positive deviance is defined by Herrington and van de Fliert (2018) as "both a theoretical concept and a practical strategy for understanding honorable departures from the norm, and effecting positive social change" (p. 676). Positive deviants, or the individuals who honorably depart from the norm, find solutions in their own organizations, leading to the potential for more adopters of the solution, as well as a higher likelihood of the solution being sustained, all because they are generated locally.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to identify the teachable factors that create educational success for some students in poverty at the Success Program at a New England independent high school. The Success Program began in 2012 in anticipation of a significant increase in poverty rates at the high school, based on elementary student poverty rates. It primarily serves first-generation, college-bound high school students. Their mission is to develop a strength of character and purpose, alongside college and career readiness skills.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

Central question:

- What do students from the Success Program identify as the main factors of their success?

Sub Questions:

- What teachable factors create educational success in students in the Success Program?
- What attributes facilitate educational success for students in poverty in the Success Program?

Participants

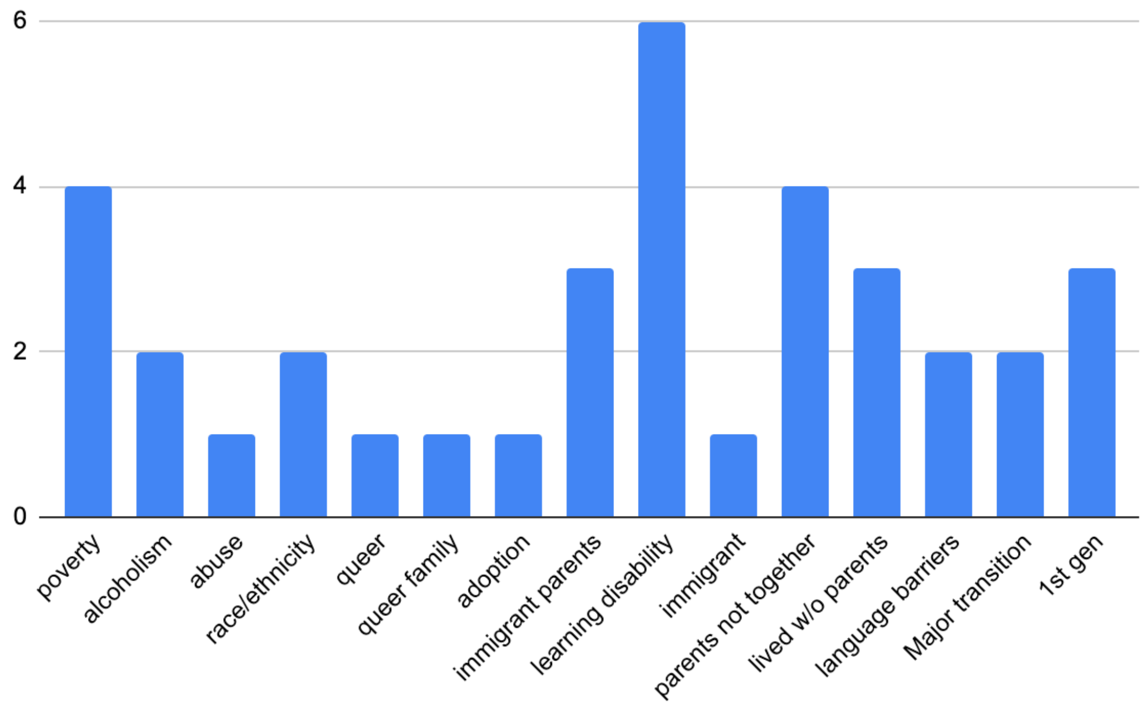
The school supplied anonymous data with random numbers instead of names. This data was then used to find the mean GPA. Then those individuals with GPA's higher than the mean were sorted according to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) score. The school used three categories of ACE scores. Only the remaining alumni with ACE scores showing the most significant adversity were chosen. Out of these results, the remaining individuals were sorted according to how active they were in the program, another score the school already collected. Eight students were interviewed with semi-structured questions.

Results/Findings of the Research Study

Out of the eight individuals interviewed, six of them identified learning disabilities or identified their Special Education teacher as an important part of their high school experience, indicating that they have a learning disability. One additional student identified anxiety as a major factor in his life. One of the students with a disability identified that they have dyslexia, a diagnosis not recognized as a learning disability in the state of Vermont, therefore not being part of the special education world in high school. Therefore, five out of eight students also had a relationship with a special educator in some way, shape or form.

Figure 1

Demographics of Participants



Only four participants identified themselves as having a low economic status in high school. Four out of eight of the participants also had parents who were separated. Three also had parents who were immigrants, and three lived without their parents for at least some of high school. Three alumni identified as being first-generation college bound. Two participants identified alcoholism in their family; two identified as people of color; two identified language barriers; and two identified major transitions occurring during high school. Each of the following were also identified by at least one participant: abuse, queer, queer family, adoption, immigrant.

None of the eight participants identified their gender during the interview. Given the researcher's hesitancy to place gender upon others, as well as to protect the anonymity of the participants, all alumni will be referred to individually with the pronouns they/them.

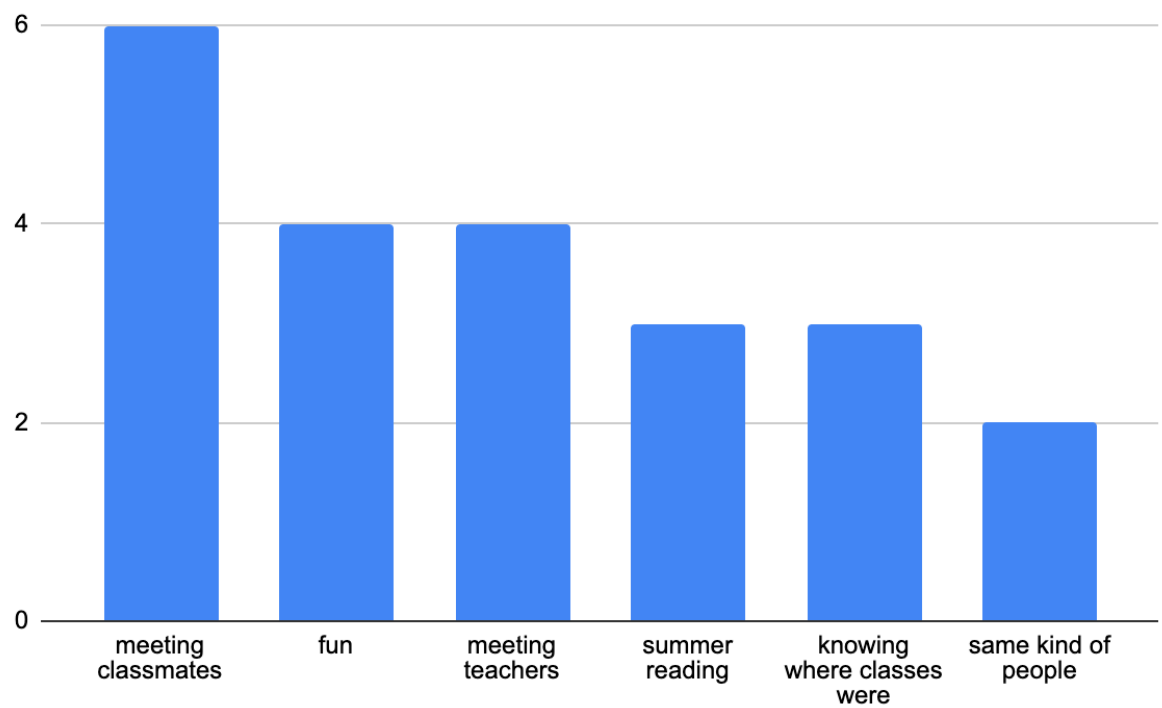
All the eight participants went to the Student Success Camp, a camp for incoming 9th graders to help transition between eight and ninth grade. They each discussed what they valued out of the camp. Six of the eight valued meeting classmates. Four students valued meeting teachers and four students valued having fun. Three students valued the completion of summer reading assignments and three students valued knowing where their classes were when school started. Two students valued that the program had the same kind of people as themselves. One stated that although they felt intimidated the first week of Success Camp, they soon found comfort in being with others like themselves.

> It felt very quickly, like in the first week of being with everyone, 'Oh my god, I have people. There are people who are like me. There are people who are completely different from me, but we have these similarities.' Like, there were a lot of people who had parents with alcoholism. There were a lot of other students who grew up without college-educated parents. It was clear that I wasn't the only one going through these things, so it was really that sense of community. (Participant 1)

It is interesting to note that the two students who valued that the program had the same kind of people as themselves, also identified themselves as low income. The value of being in a cohort of people facing similar backgrounds was also discussed in relation to the Prep for Success class. One student discussed how the class could have real conversations, recognizing their backgrounds. They were taught that "adversity is a good thing. It's how you're going to grow. But you need to do that work to turn that in a way that's going to help you" (Participant 1). While the students had these real conversations in their Prep for Success class, the lesson stuck with some students, who continued their connection with their cohort. "They were the people who I would go to if anything was happening and I was just like, 'Hey, I know you have very similar circumstances. Could I talk to you about this?'" (Participant 1)

Figure 2

Success Camp Goals



In addition to the support participants felt because of going to the Success Camp, one interviewee reflected that the experience resulted in their classwork being more differentiated and individually designed for their learning needs. "It was also great that teachers were there that were going to have freshmen in their classes because they were going to get a head start on, *How am I going to teach this person? How am I going to adapt to them?*." (Participant 4) This student found that as a result, the teachers were "very accommodating and understanding of how I was learning." Another student described working with a teacher who had been at camp. "She knew how my brain worked… She would sit me down and we would do it the way I understand it" (Participant 7).

Six of the eight students followed their camp experience with the Prep for Success Class, taken their freshman year. Only two students took the Prep for College class during their Junior or Senior year, although one of these had not taken the Prep for Success class their freshman year, indicating that seven out of eight participants followed up camp with at least one class in the program. Two students came back to Success Camp as mentors later in high school. Four students remembered attending Success Program social events, four attended end of year trips, and four went on college visits with the program. One interviewee commented on the structure of the program, stating that "it went through all the steps of being a young adult and getting into the next portion of your life that you won't be able to take care of… At the very beginning it helped. With the very end too" (Participant 5).

The Success Program held monthly check-in meetings. Seven out of eight students attended these meetings. The one student who did not go to the check-in meetings instead met frequently one on one with the program director. These numbers also indicate that participation in the Success Program was an important indicator of success. One interviewee "really liked always having points of contact" (Participant 1). The engagement was not forced but connected to the support students were receiving. The same student referred to it as "non-stop support." One reason students were willing to engage in the monthly check-ins was because "everybody was there for the same reason, to get help and support, and it was provided" (Participant 2). "You never felt rejected or judged by anybody. It was seamless support" (Participant 1). One interviewee described their time in the Prep for Success class and monthly check-ins as the only times they were truly engaged at school.

> I just went [to school] to go and sometimes when I went to school, I just went just to be there [the Success Program]. I wasn't present in my mind… But when I was in the program or something, I snapped out of it. Every time I was in the class I would snap out of it and I would focus again… Every time I go to that class, I felt alive again. I felt comfortable again. I feel like that was a part of my success for me. (Participant 2)

Five of the eight applied for and received grants to attend events they were passionate about. This is a higher number than anticipated by the researcher, indicating either that a large percentage of students in the program receive grants or that the receiving of a grant and participating in something they are passionate about is an indication of success. One student indicated that a grant opportunity "fundamentally changed" their life because it "changed [their] outlook as to how you can help other people" (Participant 1). Additionally, it led to the "financial stability" of participant one "which is a thing that none of [their] family members had." Two of the five discussed learning that they were not interested in the field they were pursing because of the grant, but additionally mentioned that learning about their disinterest at that stage of their life was helpful in making future decisions. The program director supported the use of grants to figure out whether a future career was something individuals want to pursue. One individual who found out that her career idea was not right for her through a grant remembers that the director encouraged her to apply despite her reservations. "We could see what it's like and see if its something we would want to do. [The Program Director] was all on board. He said, 'Go for it! Go see the world kids.' I feel like it pushed me to be a little more open-minded and just not be terrified of everything and take those risks" (Participant 7).

Another student who also learned through a grant experience that their career choice was not correct for them added, “That grant helped me to open my eyes a little bit. It helped me to discover that there are different ways to accomplish my goal, my passion, in the future” (Participant 8). The same individual later commented that simply taking advantage of this grant opportunity showed them that they “can do big things.” This openness to grants not only to get experience within a future career path, but also to figure out students’ passions appears to be a deliberate choice on the part of the program.

Every interviewee identified the Success Program motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth* as meaningful to them, although two of the eight said that it did not take on meaning until after high school. When asked what from the Success Program was most influential to their success, one interviewee discussed how they have continued to use goals, habits, growth in their daily life. “Since I was 17 I’ve had this goal journal that I write all my goals in for the year out on and keep working through those…. I literally just turned 21 and I just set my goals for when I turned 22 a few weeks ago” (Participant 1). Another student reflects that before participating in the Success Program, they “had more of a fixed mindset. I used to really tear myself down if I messed up on anything or got a bad grade. Just being able to change that mindset so I could grow…Being able to set goals I knew I could reach really helped my confidence” (Participant 3).

One area not anticipated by the researcher was that half of the participants, four out of eight, discussed helping other people as an important component of the Success Program. One interviewee stated that an aspect about the program they loved is that “they give back” (Participant 2). Participant two desired to “push it forward.” Giving back to others introduced one interviewee to “a different way of living. It gave [the student] some perspective” (Participant 5) One interviewee indicated that through the Success Program they received “help passing on help to other people so [they] could continue to help" (Participant 1) When later asked how they would continue to use what they've learned as part of the Success Program, the same interviewee answered,

> Helping low-income people. Helping people who are first-generation college students. Because I see that as the path to breaking the chain of poverty that is so prevalent in society…. It's seeing someone doing the work that we should all be doing. (Participant 1)

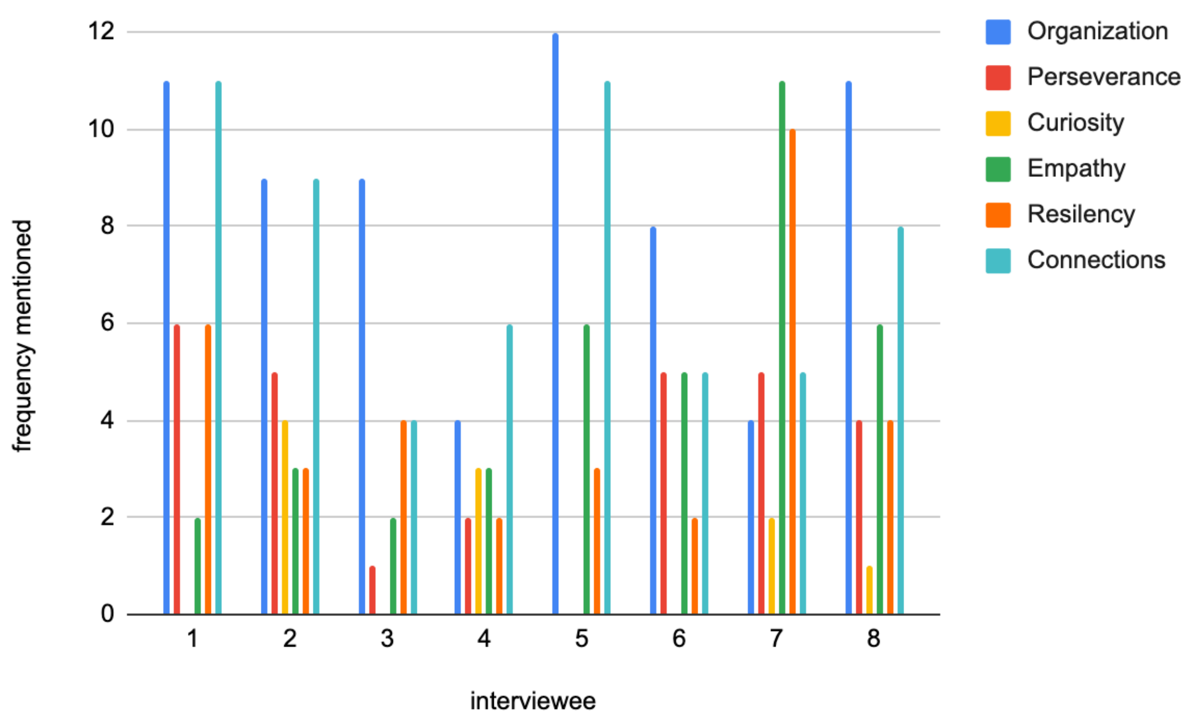
Relationships also indicated success. Every student interviewed identified school staff members as an important part of their success. Names of specific individuals varied, but names were mentioned between four and twenty-one times in each interview. Seven out of eight participants mentioned the name of the director of the program as a reason for their success, with his name appearing an average of 4.875 times per interview.

Out of the five individuals who had access to a Special Educator, all five also mentioned their Special Educator by name as a reason for their success. Out of these five individuals, the name of their Special Educator was mentioned an average of 3.8 times. One specific Special Educator was named by four of the five individuals. Given that no questions were asked about Special Education and many were asked about the Success Program, these numbers are high, indicating strong relationship building between Special Educators and their students within the Success Program. One interviewee named her special educator her "mentor" (Participant 8)

Participants were asked multiple questions from various angles about why they were successful in high school. While students used various terminology, their resulting answers fell into six broad categories: Organization, Perseverance, Curiosity, Empathy, Resiliency and Connections. All eight individuals discussed organization, empathy, resiliency, and connections as key components of their success. Perseverance was discussed by seven people and curiosity was discussed by four individuals. In examining how often each trait arose, organization was discussed an average of 8.5 times per interview, connections 7.375 times, empathy 4.75 times, resiliency 4.25 times, perseverance 3.5 times, and curiosity 1.25 times. While curiosity was the least discussed, the other five categories could be considered the indicators of success for students, with organization holding the most weight of the five.

Figure 3

Success Traits



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Participants indicated that some of these traits were directly taught, either through the classes or through meetings with the head of the program. One alumnus said that when they were struggling, they would go to the program head.

> He would really kind of give me different options. He'd be like, we'd do this. Or this could be a way we could go at it. Or we could do this… 'Cause I remember when there were a lot of times when I'd be like, I'm losing it. I'm at my breaking point. He would just sit me down and we'd talk about it. And he'd come up with all these different ideas, and I'd be like, how'd you do that? It really helped me be like, 'Ok. I need to start taking a deep breath and thinking about what my options are and what to do'. (Participant 7)

The process of how to make logical decisions was modeled for the student, going along with the direct instruction that was happening in the classroom. Another student identified that the direct instruction of planning, particularly around the motto *Goals, Habits, Growth* was the reason for their success in college. This student is dyslexic but said that the classroom teaching "helped inspire me to read books like *Grit* and *Growth Mindset*" and "made me fall in love with reading books" (Participant 1).

Organization was directly taught along with the *Goals, Habits, Growth* motto. One alumnus discussed how they still use the organized structure of the motto in their current line of work.

> Anytime I go to do any project, I have to break it down in some way and this is the big goal, and this is how we're going to get there. What are the habits and how will we say we've achieved the goal. And if we don't completely achieve the goal, where did we get to? … This is what we'll need to check off to do it and this is how we'll either say we've achieved the goal or we didn't completely achieve it but this is what we did achieve.

Perseverance and resiliency were described more frequently than directly discussed in the interviews. For instance, one alumnus described the abuse in their family in high school, resulting in divorce and a drastic change in economic status. When asked about what they are doing now, this alumnus' response was that they were "loving life." The individual worked through bullying and the loss of friendships through hard work and connections with adults. The student directly tied their current employment success to the Success Program, which not only allowed the individual to get career experiences during high school, but also "hooked [them] up with two job opportunities that ended up being [their] start and getting [them] a lot of experience." "The Success Program definitely helped me get my start there for sure and helped me get my foot in the door." This individual believes that the skill that best helped them to find success was "persevering through everything and not giving up."

Another alumnus showed resiliency through family alcoholism that resulted in living away from their parents for periods of time, as well as being bullied at school for having a father in jail and "two lesbo moms." This interviewee referred to all the above mentioned as "a lot of stuff that really pushed me…. I don't want to be like that… I don't need alcohol to consume me."

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Individuals discussed their ability to persevere through advocating for themselves, which was a skill they learned through the Success Program. One alumnus said that they "became really good at advocating for myself and telling people, *This is what I need*" (Participant 7).

The program taught perseverance through using team-building exercises like a ropes course. One alumnus recalled working with a partner on the ropes course. Both students were "freaking out and we kind of looked at each other and were like, 'We can do this. What are we freaking out about? Let's just get to the top.' And we did" (Participant 7).

Empathy was also directly taught in meaningful ways that could translate to real world situations. Participant Seven discussed the Prep for Success class.

> Having that class and having the people that I did, that helped out a lot and kind of pushed me to get used to kind of working with others. Because now that I have my job now, I still have to work with others and now I have the skills and stuff to kind of be like, 'Ok. Like, you need to hear them out. You need to hear their ideas and kind of compromise', and I feel like also that class really taught me how to compromise. (Participant 7)

Empathy was also taught in relation to oneself. One interviewee recalled watching *The Masks We Wear* and discussing "the way we mentally treat ourselves negatively impacts the people around us" (Participant 1). This student found it so meaningful that the student "remembers it 7 years later."

Empathy played a role in teamwork, which was a skill that was actively taught in the program. Participant Seven commented that the program was

> Just different then your regular classes… learning how to do all the teamwork and the trust and the bonding. Just putting it into my real life…. Using those things in my real life… helped a lot. I don't think I would have been as successful as I am today. I just feel like it would have gone completely in the other direction, and it would have been bad.

The importance of connections is clear through the tagline of the director's email: "It takes a village." One interviewee discussed just knowing that there were adults in the program there if they were needed was "like having a card in your pocket" (Participant 4). Additionally, participants talked about their teachers in powerful ways. "They kind of had my back" was Participant Three's memory of their teachers. Participant Two recalls that although their parents may not have been supportive, their teachers "were adults in my life that I could turn to for support." Beyond that, connections with other students in the program were also discussed. One interviewee emphasized the trust based on a strong foundation of friendship that they developed through the Success Program and the mental health support that it provided.

> Mental health is a big thing to be successful. If you don't have good mental health or strong support and a strong background, you can lose focus very fast and most people give up on their dreams because they don't have that pillar of support. (Participant 2)

Participant Five pointed out that much of high school learning is from their peers. When asked what helped them to be successful, they answered,

> Kids who were in the actual course. They were pretty helpful in making me who I was as a person… every kid is a sponge soaking up everything around them. They don't soak up everything from their teacher. They soak up some stuff, but they soak up everything with the group they are in. (Participant 5)

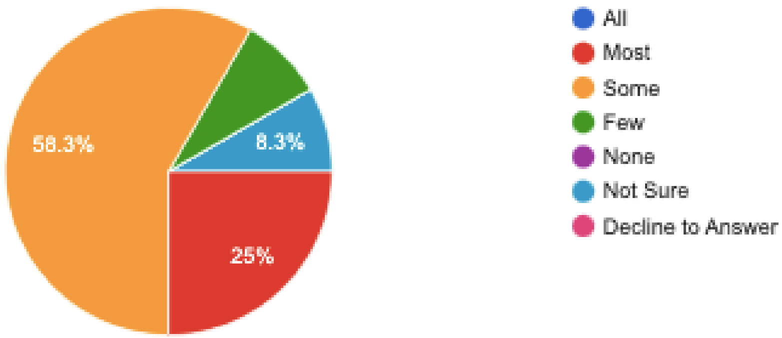
The combination of connections with staff and students in the program created a safe space, leading one interviewee to say that "I feel safe in that environment" despite their accent and disability (Participant 8). Another called it a "safe space" to go when their home life was filled with abuse (Participant 6). Another alumnus referred to it as "a little family that you have in school" (Participant 7).

In addition to the interviews, a survey of teachers to gauge their understandings of the term *success* was sent out. The survey given to faculty was sent out in a faculty newsletter. Twelve staff members responded to the anonymous survey. It was sent out to faculty members of the whole school, not just the Student Success Program, and its questions were asked about their students in general, not just about the students in this program.

In the survey of faculty, when asked how many of their students have set goals for their education, 25% answered *Most* and 58.3% answered *Some*.

Figure 4

How many of your students have set goals for their education?



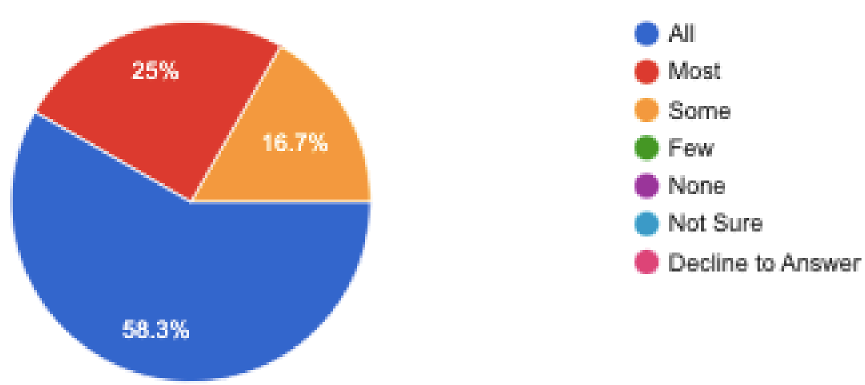
When faculty was asked how many of their students have the ability to succeed academically, 58.3% answered that all their students have the ability to succeed academically. 25% answered that most of their students have this ability and 16.7% of their students have this ability. This contrasts with the students themselves, who indicated high degrees of growth, despite their backgrounds, and an expectation of themselves that they would grow. One student who grew up in an alcoholic family was able to connect the growth mindset to the motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth*. Before joining the Success Program, they said that,

> In my head, change was always this really complex thing where I saw years of cycles of alcoholism destroying my family and change looked like this impossible thing. Then we were able to break it down so much so that you set a goal and that's what we focus on. And then we put the habits in place that are going to lead to that goal. You keep moving up and you're going to grow. There's not an option to not grow. That framework… I didn't have to rethink of the Success Program to remember that framework. It is just part of how my brain works now. (Participant 1)

Another student outgrew their own demographics as a person of color with a learning disability and is in their last year of college. They reflect that "growth brought me to the next level, which is the college level. I still have that room to grow even more though. I feel like I still can grow. I'm not really done yet" (Participant 8). Each interviewee discussed their own growth and the meaningful connection made between their growth and the motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth*, however this same connection is not shared by all faculty members. This is particularly concerning given the cultural stigma connecting with students in poverty with low academic performance.

Figure 5

How Many of your Students have the Ability to Succeed Academically?



Practitioner Contribution

One area of consideration for programming based on the results of this case study is the connection of cohorts based on demographic information. Two students valued that the program had the same kind of people as themselves and spoke of the comfort that brought them. It is interesting to note that these two students also identified themselves as low income. One consideration for practice is to identify smaller cohorts of individuals around demographic information and have these cohorts meet regularly. Smaller cohorts who may share similar issues, such as race, economic status, family alcoholism, or LGBTQ, may encourage the connections indicated as important by all students. Additionally, if a different staff member who also shares that demographic identifier runs these smaller cohort meetings, it could encourage the diversity of relationships found in this research and ensure that a program is not built around one individual, such as a program director.

The level of engagement with the Success Program was high among participants. The research suggests that encouraging students to continue engaging with the program after their initial touchpoint is an area to focus on. When schools establish programming, the scope and sequence of this programming should be considered in its entirety. All eight participants attended the transitional Success Camp, which has high buy-in among students and many of the participants expressed that it was fun. However, this research indicates that the level of long-term success based on this transition event alone is not enough. Ensuring that future touch points are diverse, fulfilling several needs, could help with this engagement. The two classes were discussed positively by all alumnus who took them, with multiple stories of skills learned and growth achieved. Continuing courses to teach the five identified areas of organization, perseverance, empathy, resiliency, and connections are supported through this research.

Students applying for grants and following through with attendance at events or programs indicated areas of passion for successful students. Early identification of passion projects, along with grant writing, could be built into coursework. This may best be paired with understanding a growth mindset, as students may learn that they are not as passionate about an area as first believed.

Given that 100% of participants identified Goals, Habits, Growth as meaningful and that staff also indicated that students taking responsibility for their learning would lead to high academic growth, this framework has universality and applicability for other programs geared towards first-generation college students. Additionally, this framework could be further emphasized within the larger context of the case study, as 58.3% of teachers answered that only some of their students had set educational goals. The specific instruction of *Goals, Habits, Growth* that is taught in the Prep for Success and Prep for College classes, could be applied more universally, not only within the context of this case study, but throughout educational institutions.

The disconnect between 100% of successful participants commitment to a growth mindset and that 41.7% of teachers believe that not all their students have the ability to succeed academically additionally shows that more professional development work could focus on growth mindset. While the Success Program focuses on student growth, the larger context of the school could also focus on staff growth in this area. Each interviewee discussed their own growth and the meaningful connection made between their growth and the motto of *Goals, Habits, Growth*, however this same connection is not shared by all faculty members. This is particularly concerning given the cultural stigma connecting with students in poverty with low academic performance. Professional development that unpacks unconscious bias along with growth-mindset work with adults could improve a culture of wrap-around support.

The role of giving back was unexpected by the researcher. No question specifically addressed it, although the researcher ended her interviews thanking the interviewee, who frequently indicated that they did the interview to give back to the Success Program. One interviewee said she "just wanted to pay it forward" by participating (Participant 6). This desire to give back is connected to the role of relationships in achieving success. The way students felt supported is the feeling they want to give to others. Implications for this include tying community service into passion projects and making sure community service is meaningful for the individual. This could be achieved through giving to an organization that is represented in the student's mind by an individual who has either helped them or who they are strongly connected to. The grounding of giving in relationships rather than the abstract idea of others could lead to an increase in giving, as indicated through this research.

There are also programmatic recommendations based on the strong connection between special educators and participants. One recommendation is that the Special Education department collaborates more directly with the Success Program to align goals and identify needs. A second recommendation is more universal. Programs for first-generation students could pair with special educators because many of the skills taught overlap. For instance, *Goals, Habits, Growth*, as a motto, is an example of executive functioning skills, which are skills that many special educators directly teach to their students. In this way, the connections that participants made between themselves and special educators could be part of the structure instead of a happy accident. One interviewee, when asked what skills helped them to find success in high school, mentioned "maximizing as much as possible all the help I got" (Participant 3) This student took advantage of both a Study Skills class, with a four-year relationship with a special educator, and the Success Program. Later, the same student talked about the monthly meetings that were a part of the Success Program. They said that the meetings were an

> opportunity to advocate for yourself. It was a structured time to say,' I'm really doing a bad job in this class. I need a lot of help.' And that would get the ball rolling on how to get that person help to be successful… It wasn't so much what I did during those

> meetings because I had the study skills class and I was already doing that with [Name of special educator]. (Participant 4)

This alumnus experience indicates overlap in the fulfillment of the goals of the Success Program and the goals of the IEP. Ensuring that any overlap is deliberate through planning and joint goal setting could lead to more effective strategies.

More universally, this research could be used to suggest that teams come together to talk about students, rather than having content-specific teams alone. The benefit of this could be not only ensuring less overlap, or at least more deliberate overlap, but also increased empathy for student experiences and improved relationships with students.

Finally, the findings of the role of connections in finding success, in this case with the program director or with a special educator, suggests a model in which a relationship is built over a multi-year period. In this case, there was the same program director for all four years of high school for each of the participants, and, for those who were on IEPs, the same special educator for four years. This system could be achieved more universally through an advisory system that is closely connected to skill building. What both the special educators and the program director have in common that an advisor does not is that the special educators and program director often, if not always, had their students in a class and therefore is working with them on specific skills.

The five main indicators of success, organization, perseverance, empathy, resiliency, and connections, could be the organizational framework for any programming to increase academic success, as they were the indicators identified by the participants. Knowing these indicators could encourage program leaders, or teachers of courses in this area, to directly teach these skills.

Additionally, these five main indicators of success could become the rubric by which a program could be evaluated. Further study is needed to see if correlations exist between different definitions of success and these five indicators. Additionally, further case studies in various educational environments are needed to indicate the universality of these categories. However, the program studied could begin to build rubrics around these areas to self-evaluate their own program.

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